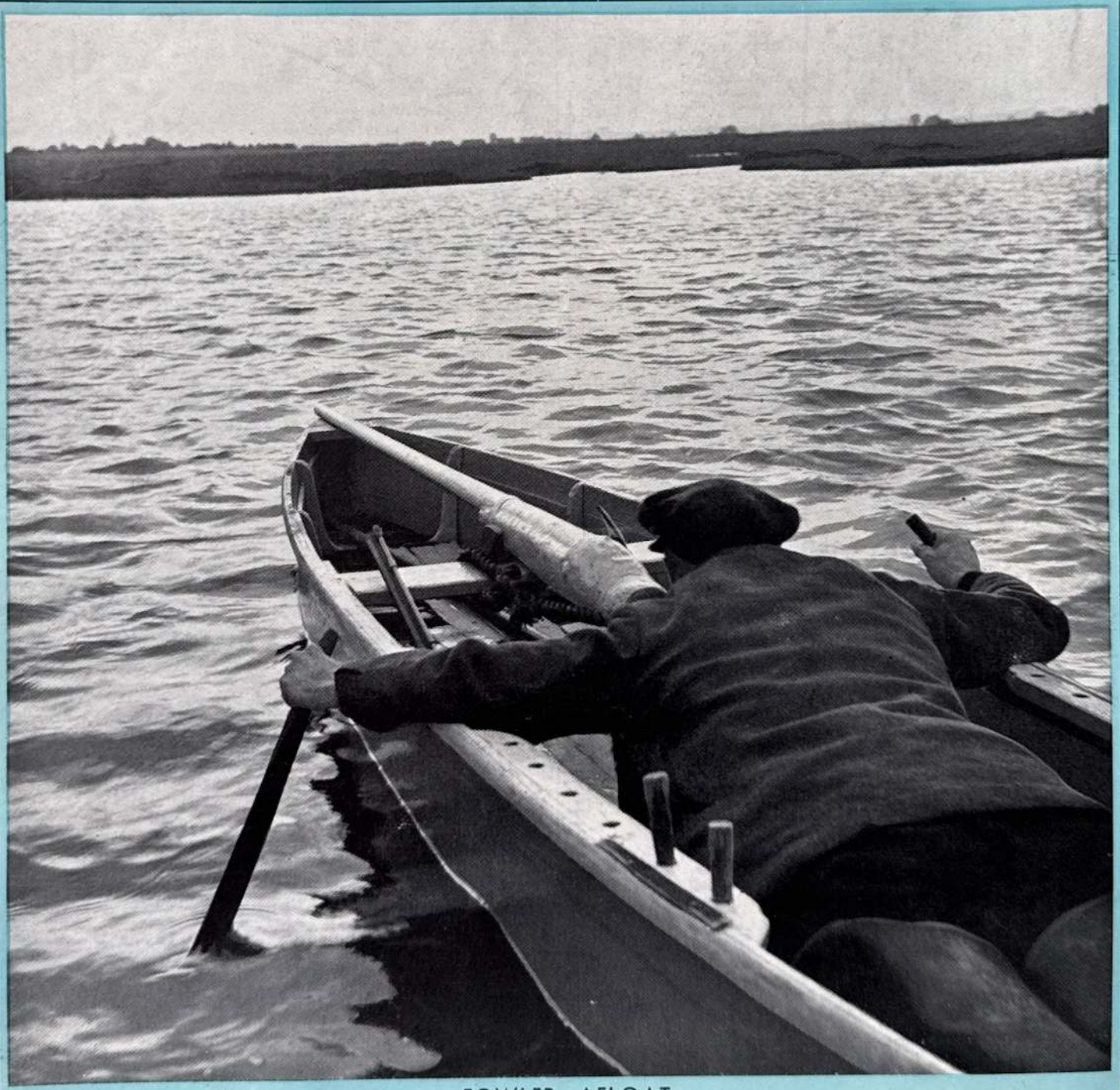
A SHOOT IN HOLLAND by Brigadier A. E. Stokes-Roberts

The SHOOTING TIMES
and Country Magazine

SEVENTY-THIRD YEAR FRIDAY, DECEMBER 30th, 1955 1s. 3d. WEEKLY



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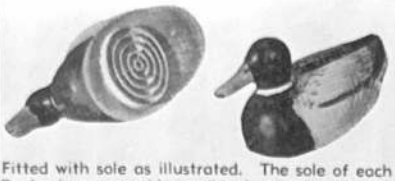

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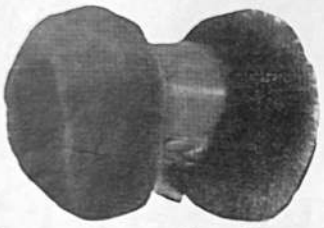

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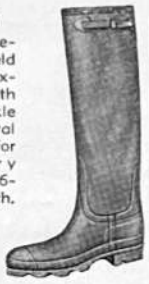

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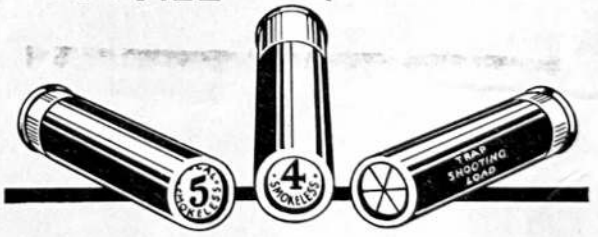

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Wildfowling Exhibition

WILDFOWLING has never courted publicity. It has always been essentially a "lone wolf's" calling — a solitary, rather secret sport enjoyed, or endured, by its devotees in lonely, desolate, lovely places when the rest of the world is asleep, or huddled closer over the fire and shivering at the stormy blast without. As such, it was always accepted as part of our proud heritage of field sports, and in a free world no one interfered with the few who followed the tide and interfered with no one. What need, after all, was there and what point in publicising the last of the wild, free sports for which a man must be born or possess an instinct as old as time itself? The idea that anyone would dare, or be sufficiently interested, to attempt to suppress any form of traditional, healthy, harmless sport was unthinkable.

However, it happened, and we remember all too well and with a shudder the attacks first on the citadel of fox hunting, and more recently on the hastily erected "boma" of wildfowling by the anti-sport fraternity, and how the first was repulsed by a well-trained, long established force, and the second was held at bay by a hard-fighting band of militia who rallied swiftly and faithfully to the cause. But only just in time!

Since then, we have gone from strength to strength, have won victories and lost a few battles, and by convincing once hostile opponents that we have at heart the common cause of conservation, are better placed to negotiate treaties and concessions. There is, however, much more to be done before wildfowling is secure for all time and one of the greatest enemies we have to conquer, not only outside, but also within our own ranks, is ignorance. If we all know what we are doing and why, and can tell the world about it we shall not only strengthen our own side but may recruit to it a number of the unthinking element who are always so ready to oppose anything of which they are ignorant.

We now have a chance to do this, and those to whom the wildfowler has always appeared as a rather mysterious menace, have an opportunity of seeing for themselves how wrong they are. Yesterday the second annual Boat Show, sponsored by the *Daily Express*, opened at the Empire Hall, Olympia, and will last until January 10. Here, at the biggest boat show ever held in Britain, you will be able to see and hear the truth about the sport of wildfowling, its achievements, aims, objects and the equipment required, for the Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland is presenting, on the second floor of the exhibition, a special wildfowling display.

This includes exhibits of various species of wildfowl, a fully-equipped gunning punt, Col. Peter Hawker's punt gun, action photographs, and many items of wildfowling gear, etc., but more than that, it provides a meeting place where shooting men and wildfowlers in particular can foregather to discuss their problems and put themselves and their friends up-to-date with latest developments. For the whole story of wildfowling is here—the written word and the exhibits.

Whether you are a 'fowler or not, and especially if you can bring along one of those disbelievers who still think that shooting men are the last word in destructive stupidity, come and have a look at Stand 10.

* * *

BEDFORDSHIRE PIGEON CAMPAIGN

In the New Year the Bedfordshire Agricultural Committee are launching another campaign against pigeon which, in large flocks, are causing great damage in the county. Little effect has been noticed on the numbers of pigeon or the damage they cause, despite the shooting of some 60,000 since August, 1953, when the half-price cartridge scheme began in the county. During this period nearly 350,000 cartridges have been distributed. Not all the shooting has been ineffective. There are pigeon shooting specialists in the county, but not enough of them. For instance, Sir John Richmond, of Westoning, and his gamekeeper, Mr. Tom Norris, recently shot 241 pigeon in a day at Westoning, and other specialists are shooting from 60 to 120 a day. A series of meetings will be held in the New Year, with particular emphasis on instruction in shooting over decoys and on flight lines.

ARMY VERSUS CONSERVATION

It is interesting to note that, according to the Wildlife Management Institute, an Army strawman was demolished from within with the recent acknowledgment of its legal representatives that Congress had not directed Interior Secretary McKay to give up 10,700 acres of the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma as an artillery range for nearby Fort Sill. This finding came from a joint Interior-Army review of the Congressional hearings and the appropriations Act that touched off the Wichita question. Interior recognised this from the beginning and on October 20 Secretary McKay made public his "unalterable opposition" to transfer of the refuge lands. In the next few days, Interior's representatives will discuss their "buffer zone" plan with the Army. This would permit the Army to fire its weapons from the refuge towards the Fort Sill holdings as has been done in the past. But unlike the Army's plan, it would not deny the public access to the many fine recreational areas and lakes within the disputed tract. With no legal authority and with widespread public opposition to its exclusive use of the wildlife refuge as an artillery range, many question the probability of an Army appeal to the White House. Secretary of Defence Charles E. Wilson and Army Secretary Wilbur M. Brucker are continuing to receive protests to the Army's plan to grab this unique national wildlife refuge.

VIOLENCE TOWARDS KEEPER

Already committed for trial at Quarter Sessions on a charge of using violence towards a gamekeeper at Slindon, Sussex, on November 18, Stanley William House, smallholder, of Slindon, appeared on remand before Arundel County Bench charged with taking or destroying by night game on land at Slindon occupied by Messrs. Leslie Langmead, Ltd. He was remanded for a further three weeks. The chairman, Mr. E. M. West, told him that sentence on three summonses to which he had pleaded guilty on November 21 for possessing a firearm without a firearms certificate and having no gun licence, would be suspended until the charge at Quarter Sessions had been dealt with. House, who had previously been refused bail by this Court, was now released on bail which had been granted to him by a Judge in chambers.

POACHING WITH A CATAPULT

A man who shot a pheasant with a catapult in Stansted Park, Sussex, appeared before the Magistrates on Tuesday, charged with three offences. He was John Walter William Dridge, house painter, of Havant, and the charges, which he admitted, were trespassing on land in search of game, killing game without a licence and killing game on a Sunday. He was fined £1, £3 and £3 respectively, with £1 costs. Mr. F. J. Bayfield, employed as under-keeper by Lord Bessborough, said he was patrolling the park when he saw accused knock over a pheasant with a catapult. It was stated that Dridge had a number of previous convictions.

AGAIN THE BUZZARD!

The buzzard is certainly in the news today, and readers have sent us many cuttings about it—both ordinary and extraordinary—from provincial papers. From among them we chose the following, culled from the *Cornish and Devon Post*, and sent to us by Mr. J. R. Mitchell. "A buzzard hawk, estimated to have a 5ft. wing span, waits for the driver of a Torridge Vale Dairies (Torrington) lorry when he arrives every morning to collect milk at Bogtown, Northlew. The buzzard always perches on a particular churn and as soon as the driver, Mr. Joe Baylon, of Taddiport, Torrington, approaches, assumes an aggressive air. Mr. Baylon has tried throwing the tops of churns to scare the buzzard, but the bird refuses to budge unless Mr. Baylon arms himself with the lorry starting handle. Threatened with this, the buzzard usually departs."

MAN BITES DOG

As a change from the usual run of buzzard stories, we report that a buzzard in Devon was mobbed and killed by a flock of young turkeys.

Wildfowling Enterprise

by Tower-Bird

LET me make it clear straight away: I am always glad to be able to help any shooting tyro, be he young or not so young, over some of the problems which confront him, i.e. to the best of my ability. Particularly do I like to advise the young shot, though I hope youthful readers of this journal will address their queries and grouses to my colleague "Petrel." But while I am always delighted to be able to aid the less experienced shooting man, and particularly the wildfowler, I would like to address the main theme of this article to those who might profit more if they showed a greater degree of enterprise in helping themselves, rather than expecting the fruits of sport to be offered to them on a plate.

During the wildfowling season I am at times almost besieged with letters from two types of would-be fowlers and fowlers. The first usually consist in the main of schoolboys and older readers who, having had little or no experience of fowling, ask me how they can set about it, and where they should go. The second are mainly fowlers of limited or greater experience who, saying that they enjoy my articles, ask me to let them know (often enough by return !) the best fowling spots in this and that county ; where they can find a nice, cheap, comfortable inn at which to stay ; what they can expect to shoot there, etc.

Now, taking the first "type" first, while, as I have said, I am always glad to offer advice to the beginner, even the young should think carefully before putting a questionaire before me, the answers to which may well entail a reply of several pages. Let them study the following facts, and they may better understand how, quite innocently, they not infrequently "put me on the spot."

Perhaps a schoolboy writes to tell me that he and a friend have never been wildfowling before, but they are as keen as mustard to "start learning" during the Christmas holidays. "Of course," writes my correspondent, "we are very young and have very little pocket-money. We are so many miles from the coast and thought we could use our bicycles to get down there, and we would like to know of some cheap place to stay. Could you tell us what to do when we get there, what birds we can shoot, where we can find them . . ." etc., etc. I get many such letters. Therefore, I must make one or to points rather brutally clear !

No Encyclopaedia

In the first place, while I have shot wildfowl in various districts down the east coast, and in certain areas of the south coast, and, while I hear a good deal from my friends about places where I have not shot, I am not a walking "encyclopaedia" that can be opened at the Index page, a certain place looked up, and detailed knowledge of it given on page 67 or 120 ! The fairly limited number of places which I know intimately cannot all be recommended as suitable to the Young Idea. Some of them are overshot ; some are dangerous because of muds and/or tides ; some present difficulties on account of their size, or because a boat is necessary, if any real sport is to be enjoyed.

There are other places where a youthful novice might get a fair initiation into wildfowling, and perhaps shoot his first duck and waders, but, here again, difficulties arise. To start with, I may not have shot there for a year or two, and many changes can take place in that time. For instance, one quiet spot where I used to go is now the happy hunting ground of a wildfowling club, and a youthful tyro arriving there may find (especially during the week-end) most of the best flighting spots occupied by local gunners, so that it would have been waste of my time and waste of his journey had I recommended this and that spot at this place as being one where I once enjoyed good shooting. And it must be admitted that young would-be fowlers walking along a seawall or out on the saltings, particularly at flight time, perhaps stopping to question waiting guns, hardly bears thought !

It is a most regrettable fact that the average adult fowler does not show much interest in helping the Young Idea, although it is a splendid thing that some fowling associations are now specialising in aiding the young in every practical way, realising that, if a future generation of fowlers fails to get under way, there can be no future for wildfowling.

Saltings and creeks starting to flood—ground over which, for the sake of safety, young fowlers should take the greatest of care.

Another Handicap

Another handicap under which the Young Idea struggles is due to his very youth and impecuniosity. He probably cannot afford to hire a boat, or to pay for the services of a guide. He may find rooms in some cottage in a coastal village, but he is too young to listen to, or take part in conversation at an inn, and knows nothing of the "art" and expense of "buying" information and advice through the medium of "standing treat." And the state of the beer-selling business today is such that many landlords who would let a room to a fowler who spent some time, and some money in the bar-parlour might not let a room to a young fellow who wanted to be called early and to have meals at odd times, and who would spend nothing in a licenced room.

Then again, if one has not been shooting regularly at some coastal spot, he can give only a rough guide to a correspondent, for, he, himself, knows how circumstances of weather can change the local habits of fowl almost from day to day, and the good fighting line of one period may be no fighting line at all when the visitor reaches it. Indeed, to meet with reasonable success, any fowler, old, young, experienced, or unexperienced needs to know his shooting area well, and to be able to adjust his ideas as to probabilities from earlier knowledge and recent visits. Any young fowler paying a first visit to a comparatively large area of water or saltings, with no local guide to show him the ropes, and without the means of "digging in" at an inn used by local fowlers, is lucky to get any shooting at all, except, perhaps, at curlew and redshank. And, let it be emphasised, the "redshank popper" is not popular if he continues his activities after this bird while his "betters" are waiting for geese or duck.

Join a Club

I advise the young, would-be fowler to join a fowling club, if one is handy, to try and gain the practical sympathy of an older member, and certainly to read through the books in its library. If no club is available, he should go with father, brother, or older friend on a foray or two, and read carefully any writings on fowling upon which he can lay his hands. Particularly would I recommend my aforementioned colleague's book "Approach To Shooting," quite a bit of which is devoted to the youthful fowler.

Merely to write to a scribbler of articles for advice is "pretty hopeless." And the said scribbler, however willing he is to reply, even at length, is only too well aware that, for one possible letter of thanks from the shooter of a first duck, he will receive many letters bemoaning the disappointment of their writers which will all but blame him for the failure of a wasted journey to the coast.

And to the second "type" of information - demanding fowler—the more experienced, or experienced man of little enterprise—he also should take note of what I have written. That it is a thankless business for a private individual like myself to write pages of advice about places where I have shot, but have not visited possibly for years. And again I would emphasise that I am no "encyclopaedia" or "filing system" of good fowling areas. Such correspondents are advised to join The Wildfowlers' Association of Great Britain & Ireland (assistant secretary, Brigadier G. D. Holmes, Burnham Thorpe, Nr. King's Lynn, Norfolk), or a local association. Naturally, W.A.G.B.I. is in a position to recommend fowling grounds, etc., and to offer advice to its members.

I felt that I had to write this article, since I receive far too many letters from readers simply asking for details of this and that. Mind you, I like to receive letters from my readers, but, if the present spate of "Where can I go fowling ?" ones continues, I shall have to give up fowling myself, hire a secretary, and spend the winter being a sort of fairy godfather to youthful duck shooters, and older fowlers who seem, often enough, to be too idle to get abroad themselves and discover shooting grounds off their own bat.

And far too few of them give practical support to the sport by joining W.A.G.B.I. or a local club. They seemingly are quite content to ask me to serve up a goose or a duck on a hot plate, complete with orange salad, and what-have-you !

After lunch at the Johanna's Hof (from left to right): Mr. and Mrs. Lee (two of the guns), Mr. Honig, Kees Schoen, Jaap Castricum, Mr. F. H. Pont, Mrs. and Mr. Pont junior.

A Shoot in Holland

by Brig. A. E. Stokes-Roberts

WHEN, early this year, I was invited to join Mr. F. H. Pont's shooting party in Holland for two days in November, I had visions of vast numbers of duck flighting over me at dawn and dusk, of uncomfortable vigils in hides, of endeavouring to negotiate canals with the aid of a vaulting pole, of being numbed to the bone and being invariably wet through. All the same, I accepted with alacrity, as it would be a new experience and perhaps reminiscent of other good days in China, India, and Kashmir. I was more than surprised, therefore, when told that the shoot was mostly among the dunes in North Holland and that we could expect good bags of pheasants and woodcock.

We went over by the Dover-Ostend route, and after staying the night in Ostend motored up the next day to Laren a few miles east of Amsterdam to stay with the Ponts. Being All Saints' Day, the roads, particularly in Belgium, were almost clear, but in every town and village there were crowds going to church, or proceeding to the cemetery, and practically everyone carried a large pot of white chrysanthemums. In Ghent, we were delayed a little by a long procession with three bands and many flags and standards. However, we made good time and arrived before dusk.

After dinner, I was given some more details of the shoot which is situated near the little town of Castricum, about 15 miles N.W. of Amsterdam. It extends to about 1,500 acres, mostly sand-dunes, with a narrow belt of cultivated land and stretches of woodland along its eastern boundary. This district forms part of the catchment area of the Amsterdam water supply, and is controlled by the Province of North Holland and an authority similar to the M.W.B.

Large Keepering Staff

A headkeeper with a deputy and 13 underkeepers in charge of beats are employed, and until the advent of myxomatosis their main responsibility was keeping down rabbits, and they used to account for over 20,000 a year.

As the area abounds with other wild game the authorities very wisely decided that this should provide the cost of maintenance, and they started letting the shoot at so much a day per gun to parties of four and very occasionally five. Applications to shoot have to be sent in several months in advance, and the demand is so great that now at least two-thirds of the applications have to be turned down.

F. H. Pont, son of the late William Pont, one of the biggest timber merchants in the country, has shot there regularly for the last few years. Even so, he says that he rarely gets the actual days he applies for, and that any infringement of the instructions given by the headkeeper would certainly mean that no further applications would be sanctioned.

One person is seldom allotted more than two days, when he can invite three, or very occasionally, four guests. There is a regular team of about 12 beaters who are very keen, know every inch of the area, and know how to keep a line.

Dividing The Game

At the end of a day, any woodcock shot are kept by the guns, but the rest of the game is divided, one half being retained by the authority and the other given to the guns who usually sell their share except for a brace or two. This goes some way to meet expenses, but I was surprised to hear that a cock and hen pheasant fetch only 8s. and 7s. respectively; on the other hand, a hare fetches a good deal more than in England.

I was also coached in a few words so as to have some idea what the beaters were calling during a drive. Shouts of "Tiro" denoted flying game unspecified; "Partout," ground game; "Houtsnip," woodcock. I was also warned that if I heard shouts of "Hop! Hop!" this would be a neighbouring gun announcing his position, and it was considered absolutely *de rigeur* to acknowledge the call and to be sure that the position of any flank gun was known.

The next day, we had an early start, as although only about 40 miles to the shoot, we had to go through Amsterdam and cross Het ij, the canal by ferry. Since we hoped to begin shooting at 9 a.m., and they have the extra hour of daylight in Holland, the first part of the drive was in the dark.

The weather report had been good, but a little early mist made it very difficult for us in a Standard Vanguard to keep up with our host's Mercedes Benz. Already there was a lot of traffic on the roads as in Holland even the "big shots" are in their offices by nine. Driving through Amsterdam before 8 a.m. was a nightmare; seldom have I had such a nerve-shattering experience amidst droves of cyclists in their hundreds, who seemed to have no fear, and always appeared to claim right of way.

Start of the First Drive

There was some delay at the ferry, with the result that we were a bit late at our rendezvous, the Café Restaurant Theehuis "Johanna's Hof," where the headkeeper Kees Schoen was awaiting us. However, after a cup of coffee, getting our guns out, etc. we drove straight to our stands and had scarcely got our bearings before a blast from Schoen's horn had signalled the start of the first drive.

In the morning, most of the drives were through small coverts of young oak, fir, spruce and occasional scrub, interspersed with small cultivated fields of carrots, brussels sprouts, leeks, rhubarb and bulbs, but no arable. The birds were well shown and every advantage was taken of undulations to gain height.

The first two drives had provided a preponderance of hens, so Schoen then decreed "cocks only" until cocks and hens were levelled up in the bag. After that, we were allowed, if necessary, to start with a hen, and then a cock had to be taken before downing another hen.

"Houtsnip" were shouted in practically every drive, but naturally they were not always put over the guns, and even if they were, only the greatest of optimists could expect them all to be added to the bag. A few hares were seen and a very occasional rabbit.

After the sixth drive, we returned to the "Johanna's Hof" where after suitable toasts drunk in large glasses of Bols V.O. Genever Gin, we sat down to a lunch of the house's speciality—steaming bowls of green split pea soup in which was floating an assortment of vegetables, pigs' knees and feet, and slices of smoked, savoury sausage, followed by bread and thin slices of cheese, washed down with light beer or coffee.

Jaap Castricum and his strange-looking dog.

Before starting the afternoon session, Kees

Schoen gave me some more details of his organisation. Shooting takes place on five days a week, the blank days being Sunday (not the day *pour la chasse* as in France and Belgium) and Wednesday. The season starts between October 1 and October 15 depending on notification by Government given every year and is carefully controlled. From January 1 it is always "cocks only," but during this last month there is a large increase in woodcock and sometimes as many as 80 are bagged in a day's shoot. In an average year they expect to get not less than 4,000 pheasants, all wild birds; none is reared, but they have to be regularly fed with wheat and barley, and water troughs are kept filled in the woods.

The last two years' breeding seasons have been spoilt by storms which caused drifting sand in the dunes to obliterate many nests.

It is a striking tribute to the efficiency of the keepers that such a large head of wild game can be accounted for, in spite of the fact that during the spring and summer over 20,000 passes are issued to nature-lovers and picnickers (not quiet hikers) who are officially restricted to the paths and rides. Almost more surprising to us was the fact that, in spite of such an influx, the area was quite clear of litter.

The drives in the afternoon followed much the same pattern as those of the morning except that in more of them were we allowed to shoot whatever came over.

There was a particularly good stand to finish off with before quite an audience. The guns were placed behind a hedge in which gaps had been cut, and the birds were flushed from a small wood on a slight rise 50 yards to the front. Unfortunately, a good many birds fell behind the guns in some thick undergrowth and were most difficult to find in spite of the assistance of Jaap Castricum the second keeper and his strange-looking dog. This animal was a cross between a poodle and a Drentsche Patrijs Hond and turned out to be an excellent retriever. But only having the one dog available was undoubtedly a big drawback, and as they did not like to delay between drives, we regrettably had to leave behind a certain amount of game both dead and wounded.

When we returned to the "Johanna's Hof" the game was carefully counted and divided up, and the game dealer to hand with ready cash and van to take what was not required for home consumption. We had noticed that a careful check was made after each drive, and Kees Schoen showed me a proforma which he had to submit in quadruplicate to his authority giving full details of all the guns and the game collected after each drive.

After coffee and cognac and a good deal of handshaking, we were on our way back in the dark; not a very pleasant drive as our headlights were not quite properly adjusted for right of road driving and we were at times very unpopular with oncoming traffic! Luckily Amsterdam was not quite so alarming and we were home for dinner at 8.30 p.m.

According to Place

The next day, we decided that in view of possible delay at the ferry we would start earlier and make a detour to cross the canal at one of the locks. On the way, we passed some very extensive excavations where a road tunnel is being constructed under the canal which when finished in about 18 months will be a very great boon to motorists. Everything went according to plan and we arrived with plenty of time in hand after picking up Jaap Castricum (strange that he should have the same name as the town he lived in) and his dog on the way through, as Kees Schoen was not available.

The same procedure was adopted as on the first day. The beaters met us on their bikes and after being told the programme everything went like clockwork, the guns going from stand to stand by car, and the beaters for the various drives on their bicycles.

There was, however, one very big difference and that in the terrain, for we spent the whole day among the sand-dunes proper. Large areas are covered with dune-thorn which this year had a very big crop of yellow berries much liked by pheasants. We were told that they have a bitter taste which imparts a distinct flavour to the pheasants that feed on them which is highly prized by the gourmets of Haarlem and Amsterdam.

The author enjoys a joke with the beaters after their last lot of Genever and whisky.

Some of the dunes were 30 to 40 feet high, so that birds could be shown to greater advantage and with a fair breeze blowing shooting was not easy. Most of the drives were longer, and there were no restrictions about cocks only. In any case, it so happened that cocks exceeded hens in most drives. The ground looked open enough, but the presence of the dune-thorn made the pick-up difficult and although the flankers and stops were very good at marking birds, only having the one dog was a distinct handicap.

A Useful Excuse

In the morning, the sun in our eyes made shooting difficult, although it was a very useful excuse when one missed a "sitter." We had the same lunch as on the first day as it saved any complications over ordering and was without doubt most sustaining.

In the dunes we did not see so many woodcock, but all agreed that we should have accounted for more. However, it is just like golf, or any other game—if we never missed an easy shot we should not think much of it as a sport.

On each day we took out a large bottle of Genever for the beaters and they enjoyed a small nip halfway through the afternoon, but reserved the major portion for the end of the day. I had a small flask of whisky with me "in case of emergency" and on the last day passed this round as well — a very popular move and all agreed that it was very warming. Certainly Genever and whisky sounds a pretty tough mixture.

When we got back to the "Johanna's Hof," we found Kees Schoen waiting for us, and he was delighted to hear that we had had such a good day. Our total bag for the two days for four guns was 121 pheasants, 10 woodcock, 2 hares, 1 rabbit, 1 pigeon, and several "various," including jays and hoodie crows. There were a great many of the latter about, but Schoen said this was on their migration route and he was not perturbed. Undoubtedly we could easily have accounted for another 60 pheasants if we had not been restricted so often to cocks only on the first day; also with one or two more good dogs the pick-up would have been considerably increased.

By English Standards

Driving home, I tried to draw a comparison between this and shoots in England and to enumerate its main features. By English standards, it was not unduly expensive, but against this, one must bear in mind the cost of the journey and particularly the price of meals in Belgium. If one were not taking a car, I cannot help feeling that it would have been much simpler to fly direct to Amsterdam, certainly far less tiring.

As regards the shoot itself, the organisation is excellent, and particularly for those who are no longer so active as in their young days, the fact that every stand can be reached by car, that there are no ditches to cross, no fences to climb, no barbed wire, and no mud to contend with, are features which must weigh heavily in its favour if comparison is made with many of our own shoots.

Once having shot there, I cannot imagine anyone who would not like to have another "go." Personally, I only hope that I did not shoot too badly and did not inadvertently infringe any of the local rules to prevent me from being asked again.

Occasional Quiz

by P. J. G.

From time to time we shall publish a short quiz and shall award a 10s. 6d. book token to the sender of the first all correct—or most nearly all correct—set of answers opened on the Thursday following publication. Answers and the name of the winner will be published a fortnight after the Quiz appears. —Editor.

1. *What are "hen-footed fowl"?*
2. *"My first day's shooting. I used a single barrel muzzle-loader with which Grandpapa, Uncle Eddy and Papa all started shooting. I shot three rabbits." Who wrote that?*
3. *What is a group of plover called (on the ground)?*
4. *Who was Jack Russell?*
5. *What is a "cock-road"?*
6. *How many points of choke has an improved cylinder barrel?*
7. *"About ninety in a hundred fancy themselves anglers. About one in a hundred IS an angler. About ten in a hundred throw the hatchet better than a fly." What was that written in, or who said it?*
8. *What is a (a) Blue Hawk, (b) Judcock, (c) Rothermuck, (d) Cabhar Coille?*
9. *Is a dog-licence necessary for beagles?*

A good backcloth of cloud for night flighting.

Moonlight Flighting

by David Ashenden

FLIGHTING under the moon can be a dismal failure, but it can also be a most exciting and profitable sport when conditions are right. It is generally accepted that a combination of high wind and light cloud are ideal : but there is more in it than that, as the following episode will show.

I planned an expedition to the east coast for some wigeon flighting. It is the custom in this area to flight the birds as they come off the sea to the *zostera* beds which lie well below high water. We were to shoot for the three days before the full moon. Thus the feeding grounds were exposed up till about 9 o'clock, and we could generally count on the wigeon arriving from approximately 6 o'clock onwards.

On the first two nights, the birds came in beautifully, but under a cloudless sky. On the third night, conditions appeared to be ideal—a close herring-bone sky, forming a brilliant backcloth, against which any duck would silhouette perfectly. There were several fowlers out, deployed well clear of the *zostera* beds—for where we were shooting it is the unwritten law that no one shoots on the feeding grounds themselves. Rather, we dig in between the sea and the *zos.*, lying flat and shooting from the sitting position. These mudflats are very extensive, so there is plenty of room for all.

On this night our hopes ran high. There was something indescribably lovely being out there under the moon, with only the low murmur of the sea and an occasional wader's call to break the silence. Each moment was one of mounting expectancy, but no wigeon appeared. We told ourselves the birds were late, and tried to find reasons for their non-appearance. But as the sea came upon us, we could see the wigeon, rafts of them, drifting in with the tide. As we withdrew, the wigeon, of course, departed, but talking to other fowlers later, I was told that it was quite common for the birds to behave like this *at times.* They had been observed literally to walk ashore on to the feeding ground.

Movement By Night

I have noticed a similar reaction by wigeon on cloudless nights in my valley where the river meanders across derelict marshland. There are several lakes and pools of floodwater and there is a continual movement of birds from one place to another most of the night. I have waited and watched under a cloudless sky with the moon a brilliant orb above, and have heard the procession of duck voices passing to and fro. Occasionally, I have shot a bird or two when they have been low enough in a high wind, but everyone knows the difficulty of seeing birds on a clear night. At other times, when the cotton-wool clouds sail over the shining valley and the light has been good for shooting, not a bird has stirred.

Valuable Source of Study

Here, I think, is a source of study that would well repay the time and energy spent on it, for it is seldom mentioned in books. I am convinced there is a great deal to be learned about the effect of light and cloud on the birds. It seems almost as if the duck realise that they are more vulnerable under a cloudy sky, and avoid, if possible, exposing themselves to the hidden dangers down below. And I do not think that this is a fanciful idea, because interference by man has changed their feeding habits from daylight to night. It is only one step further, that the birds have discovered the added hazard of variable light condition at night.

And so it is not surprising that, when fowlers meet, there is a wide difference of opinion over this question of shooting under the moon. There is no doubt that duck do behave erratically at the time of full moon, but as there is reason for all things the successful fowler must discover what it is in his particular area and not leave the thing to chance.

Turning to the pursuit of wildfowl, there are some elementary principles to be observed which are frequently overlooked by even quite experienced fowlers. In the first place, there is more light from a waxing moon than when it is waning. After the full, shooting light very soon goes off and it is seldom much use going out for more than a couple or three nights after full moon.

Secondly, it is desirable to work your ground or water as far as possible toward the moon. I have found that birds are often out of range by the time they silhouette with the moon behind me. On the other hand, they show up at once against the moon. This is particularly noticable where the distant background is low hills or woods.

Thirdly, it is useless to walk "along" the river bank or stream, because every duck within a hundred yards and more will see you. You should, therefore, cover your ground in a series of loops (remembering to face the moon as far as possible) so that you approach your water at right angles, commanding about 40 yards of new water in each direction, right and left. In other words, keep out of sight as long as possible.

Knowing Your Ground

Lastly, know your ground intimately, as moonlight is deceptive, especially where the surface of the marsh is concerned. What may appear an easy leap by moonlight may well turn out to be a couple of yards wider by daylight, and midnight on the marsh alone is not the time to find out !

Certain rivers and estuaries are suitable for a most exciting form of moonlight shooting which I shall call "shoulder-gunning from a punt." It is best undertaken by two fowlers, although it is quite possible to shoot and manage the punt on your own. I use a single punt—there is plenty of room for two to sit in the average single punt—and our *modus operandi* has been as follows.

Both gunners sit facing the bow, and the man in the rear position is the oarsman. He push-rows the punt while the forward gunner keeps a sharp look-out for duck. In this way creeks and gutters can be explored ; so can saltings where there is any cover. On one small estuary I know, the water spills off the saltings on to the adjoining marshes forming a shallow lake, over which you can punt through a "sea" of grasses. Any birds flushed will appear to "jump" and the forward gunner, who does the shooting will find that the duck climb steepily—so steeply, that I wager the tyro will miss more than he hits !

After a shot, it is a good plan to lie low, because other duck will take wing all round and there is every chance of further shooting. Where both gunners are absolutely safe, and can trust each other, I see no objection to both joining in at this stage on previously agreed fields of fire. I have practiced this myself, and have found that it works quite satisfactorily. Both gunners must have confidence in each other, and, I repeat, be absolutely safe.

This is a good sport and has some advantages over punt-gunning proper. Single birds can be stalked and shot at. The disturbance caused by a 12-bore is so much less, with the result that often quite a short row will bring the punt up to more birds. I know of more than one fowler shooting for the market having abandoned his punt-gun in favour of the 12-bore, because he finds that, over the average season, his aggregate bag is greater with the shoulder gun.

Apart from the extra safety precautions needed in such a confined space, there are one or two points of detail to be observed. The oarsman must learn to row quietly without splashing. There is a certain knack in this, for remember he is "push-rowing," but it soon comes with a little practice. Contrary to popular opinion, I find a dog useful. It is true it is usually wet and evil-smelling. Even so, many birds fall in inaccessible places, because much of the time one is shooting close to reeds and soft mud.

THE DOLDRUMS IN DECEMBER

by Sea-Hawk

IT is surprising what one lets oneself in for after a mess dinner—I do not mean there and then, though heavens knows that can be awkward, but rather the ideas one gets when good food and good wine have had their effect. It was during one of those evenings that Alan and I planned a week's goose shooting. But, unlike so many after-dinner plans, this one became reality. In the cold light of the "morning after" our decision to spend a week shooting geese on the Solway seemed as attractive and feasible as it had done the night before. We were serving at a seat of learning not far from London, and had had virtually no shooting, in marked contrast to the two previous seasons when we had been stationed in Norfolk, each having a gun in a small syndicate and being within easy reach of the Wash.

Eventually, the many details were resolved, and, in the middle of December, we set off in my car on the long journey north, arriving at Glencaple tired, but full of hope. We were booked with our host, and in no time settled in with his other guests. As "new boys" we could not ask enough questions, and hung on every word of the old hands as they discussed that morning's flight and their various sorties during the day.

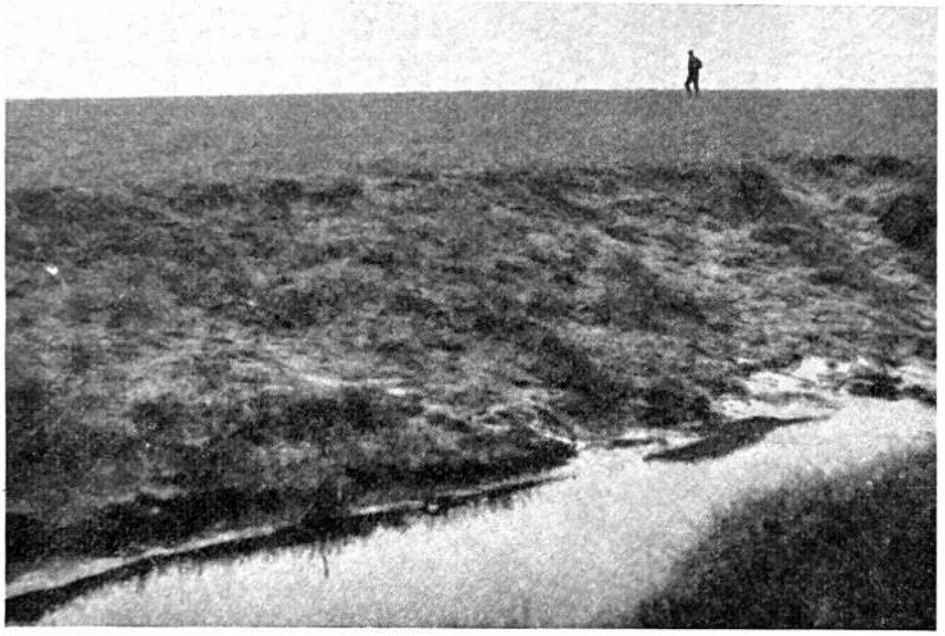
The weather had been mild and windless for the past ten days, so we were not surprised to hear that bags had been small. That such open weather could continue in December seemed impossible, and we congratulated ourselves that we would have good sport in the, to us, inevitable gales.

Novelty and Uncertainty

I can never decide which is the more fascinating, morning flight on new ground, or on a well-known marsh or estuary. I think probably the former; it has the spice of novelty and a greater uncertainty. Our first morning flight from Glencape had those in full measure, as neither of us had previously seen the surroundings in daylight. It was a still, frosty morning, and we lay on the merse-edge enthralled to see Criffell and its neighbouring hills take shape. Soon, we could distinguish the hills far to the south in Cumberland, and finally the huge gaggle of pink-feet far out on the Blackshaw Bank. The moon was nearing full and presumably the geese had flighted out late the previous night. It was broad daylight when the first skeins came over us, hundreds of feet up and well beyond even 8-bore range. In all, there must have been a flight of two thousand that morning, and many passed right over us. All we needed was wind or fog.

Wrong On Both Counts

I am no meteorological expert, but my job as a pilot induces a more than passing interest in that subject. I would have bet anybody that either those windless conditions could not last in December, or that, if they did, there would be radiation fog each morning. I was wrong on both counts, and during our five-day stay the wind barely reached five knots; each morning was crystal clear.



There is fascination in viewing fresh fowling grounds for the first time.

After each morning flight we returned ravenous and did full justice to breakfast. We then collected sandwiches and coffee and set off to prowl the merse in search of snipe, rabbits, or curlew. We lay up in ditches, stalked down creeks, and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. We even sunbathed. Our bags were small by any standards, but in those still, clear, sunny conditions the wonder is that we shot anything at all. I see from my shooting register that our best bag was three wigeon, and I can still picture Alan as he waded out to pick them up, covered from head to foot in black ooze after a belly-crawl which took 20 minutes.

Towards the end of our visit, by dint of our daily wanderings, we got to know the Blackshaw merse quite well, and decided to abandon morning flight in favour of night operations. After dinner we would return to some creek on the merse-edge to lie in wait for wigeon coming in to feed on the short sea-grass and for the lower-flying geese as they moved to and fro in small skeins throughout the night.

In this way, we succeeded in bagging a goose on our second last night. It must have been about 12.30, and we were both very cold—even rum and coffee had not warmed us. We had heard innumerable wigeon go whistling overhead, but against the dark, cloudless sky they had been impossible to see. All except one that is; I had dropped it far out in the sand but we could not find it. We were on the point of leaving when I saw about 15 geese coming straight for us, flying low over the sand. A frenzied scramble to get in position to shoot, and we each fired two barrels. One bird fell dead and we heard another pitch heavily some distance out.

It is just as well that we did not shoot more, because the only goose we picked up was a barnacle! We searched for a long time for the goose that had fallen wide, but did not find it. When I think of it in retrospect, I should have guessed that the geese were barnacles—they were flying so low and along the merse-edge, although they were not making their usual yelping call. Still, there is a world of difference between the calm of retrospection and the fierce urgency of the word "geese" whispered on a moonlit night.

The next night we had to leave, Alan going south by train while I went north. As I said goodbye to our host, I thought that I could hear the wind in the trees; by the time I had driven ten miles the moon was shining through fleecy white clouds and it was blowing half a gale. To this day I do not know why I did not turn back.

Rough Shoot Diary

by Weekender

LAST week-end turned out very cold, with squalls of rain blown by an easterly wind. I did not expect to find much about, but half-an-hour spent in the shelter of a haystack with a pair of binoculars showed that my expectations were wrong. A field of wheat was starting to sprout, and pigeon, both woodies and "scrumps," were flocking in.

These "scrumps," or church-pigeon, as they are more often called herabouts, are not much good from a sporting angle, but they are restless birds that will not sit in one place for long. Without any reason, the whole flock will rise and fly to the far end of a field, and the wood-pigeon, wary as ever, follow suit.

Now, when pigeon are doing this, a few decoys will soon be noticed, and if you let the first few birds come in without being fired at, the whole lot will soon be flocking in to your decoys.

On this occasions, a bit of camouflage netting slung between two bushes provided the cover, and before long I was getting some fast shooting, mostly on-coming birds which are not so simple as they appear at first. It is all too easy to put the whole charge of shot either above or below a bird, and as they scatter, one does not always get a chance of a second shot.

There were also one or two "blue-rocks" (stock doves) about, and once, when I saw two birds coming straight towards me, I thought, "Ah, a nice easy right and left," thinking that they were "scrumps." However, it was not to be, for as I raised my gun and fired, both of them seemed to vanish! At least my shots blew a hole in the air, and the birds flew on unharmed.

FOR GARDENERS

The 1956 "Blue Book of Gardening" can now be obtained, free of charge, on application to Messrs. Carters Tested Seeds Ltd., of Raynes Park, London, S.W.10. This catalogue, of over 100 pages, is lavishly illustrated with photographs and coloured plates—of these latter the illustration of the 1956 sweet pea novelty "Blue Bonnet" is particularly attractive.

Recommendations for the planting and cultivation of both vegetables and flowers, together with a "Diary of the Garden," make the publication of great interest to the gardener—be his property large or small.

A keeper's assistant fills in holes during a rabbit extermination campaign.

Round the Game Preserves

by David Imrie

EVER since disease reduced the rabbit population of this country we have read in various newspapers some unusual bits of natural history connected with the behaviour of hungry predators that normally live on rabbits. One paper reported some time ago that a band of famished foxes was roaming over a northern county ; another described how a stoat chased two men into a shed, and compelled them to bar the door ; but whether we accept these stories or not, there can be no doubt that many predatory creatures are now having difficulty in finding enough to eat. This week, for instance, I found at the top of the fellside covert where I live the signs which indicated unmistakeably that an owl had been killed by some other bird, probably a buzzard. There were two splashes of owl feathers six feet apart below the larches in one place, and 50 yards farther along was a bigger splash where the owl had been plucked. Nearby was some " white-wash."

An intelligent countryman to whom I mentioned this find suggested that a fox had caught the owl unawares ; but a buzzard has been haunting that area for several weeks. It skims about under the trees, just as it might hunt in springtime when the young rabbits are showing. Only yesterday it tore the chest out of an old rabbit in my tackle, and it made a tremendous fuss when it realised that I was taking away its prey. So I have not the slightest doubt that it killed the owl, although this is the first time in my career that I have known of such a happening. Normally buzzards live on carrion flesh, if they can find enough of it, but they can kill young pheasants and chickens very expertly, and they can also kill full-grown rabbits easily.

Three Foxes By Moonlight

Another incident which may or may not be connected with the scarcity of rabbits in this county now concerns the shooting of three foxes one moonlight night by a young farmer in our neighbouring valley. Apparently this fellow had been talking in the farm yard to a travelling greengrocer when some foxes began to bark in a meadow near the buildings. The young farmer at once got his gun, because he knew that a dead sheep was lying unburied in that quarter, and he carefully stalked to a part of the meadow wall where he expected to get a shot. Looking over the wall he saw two foxes at the carcase. They both fell to his first cartridge. Then a third fox, which had been lurking near, jumped on the wall in a panic, and got the second. Thus died three fell foxes in unusual circumstances.

Those foxes must have been very hungry, otherwise they would not have squabbled over a dead sheep so near to the farm in the early evening ; and although a dead sheep is no great loss, it does show in this case that rabbits have a value not included in the usual financial estimates when they are under discussion. By which I mean that if rabbits were worth £15,000,000 as human food in pre-myxomatosis times, they were probably worth as much again for providing a buffer against the depredations of predators. As a gamekeeper I do not like all predatory creatures ; but while they are here they must be fed somehow. And rabbits provide them with cheap meals. When we consider that eagles, buzzards, sparrow-hawks, owls, foxes, badgers, otters, stoats, weasels, wild cats and semi-wild cats all eat rabbits, old or young, we wonder where a substitute could be found, if the coneys were completely wiped out.

Lack of Imagination

No doubt, the authorities who are now trying to get the survivors of myxomatosis exterminated everywhere in this country are well aware that rabbits have formed a buffer in the past between our livestock and the predators, and they probably imagine that nature will balance herself somehow after the buffer is removed. But have they ever tried to imagine whether the new balance would be acceptable to the majority of people ? I should think not, otherwise they would not carry this hatred of rabbits to such illogical lengths.

If rabbits could be exterminated everywhere, there would be an intensification of those attacks on small livestock and game which we are partly experiencing now ; then the predators would vanish, except for the odd one here and there. And the British countryside would be poorer. After this melancholy state had been reached we would expect to see societies springing up to champion the cause of the dwindling predators ; for there is no limit to the folly of human beings. People who denounce rabbits now would take up the new cause and, forgetting that animals and birds require food, they would try to saddle game preservers with the paucity of predators.

Already most people have forgotten how valuable rabbits were when meat rationing was at its height. At that time I was stopped by comparative strangers and asked for either a single rabbit or a weekly supply ; but unfortunately I had to refuse all these casual requests for what was then a delicacy, because there were not enough rabbits to go round. I should think that all trappers and keepers had the same experience then. They could have sold ten times the number of rabbits which they caught weekly at big prices, so great was the demand for meat.

Housewife's Choice

While other kinds of flesh are available, a scarcity of rabbits is not likely to cause much comment, although I did read in a paper the other week that Glasgow housewives were beginning to wonder when they would be back on the market in worth-while quantities. But the total extermination of rabbits would certainly enhance their value far above the best prices offered in meat rationing times ; and we could expect to hear, in a condition of this sort, that fashionable hostesses were having rabbit specially flown in from abroad for their equally fashionable guests. However, total extermination is not yet in sight, despite the Clearance Schemes which are being put into operation all over the country.

From the field sportsman's point of view the total extermination of rabbits would be a disaster ; for, if these creatures have only a moderate sporting value, they do help to fill in the gaps where winged game is scarce. Most shooters will agree with me that a longish stand outside a covert which holds very few pheasants is made more interesting by the appearance of several rabbits. A swarm of rabbits, on the other hand, and no pheasants may not have the same effect. To the knowledgeable shooter this state of affairs will signify neglect as a rule. A few rabbits do not give this impression, and they help to keep the sportsman's attention from flagging.

When partridges are being walked up, rabbits are perhaps not so popular with field sportsmen, particularly if their dogs are rather unsteady. Nor are they popular with keepers then, for the same reason. I have seen plenty of dogs coursing all over root fields in pursuit of rabbits when they ought to have been devoting their attention to dead or wounded birds ; and although I have not been subjected to much of this annoyance by any of my own dogs, there was a time in my youth when I had to take a spaniel to the partridge shoots which was generally handled by another keeper. This headstrong creature gave me many a red face, when he got a whiff of rabbit scent. All over the field he went, jumping high over the " shaws " to get a better view of his quarry, and he was got to heel only with the greatest difficulty. But these were the only times when rabbits went out of favour with me ; and even then I realised that my embarrassment was caused by the person who made me take this unbroken dog, and not by the dog himself.

We can say, then, with truth that shooters prefer to have some rabbits in the country, despite their occasional drawbacks, because they often help to make up for the scarcity of winged game, and because they can make a sporting day by themselves when the need arises, usually with the aid of a ferret. But apart from sporting considerations, the complete extermination of rabbits everywhere (if that were possible) would put practically nothing into our pockets, and take away much from the countryside.

ON THE GAME FARM

by Joyce Eltringham

VISITORS to the game farm during the past season have included schoolboys from one of the large public schools. Perhaps gamefarming is included in the curriculum of modern education—or could be, if both boys and masters choose to stretch a point. In any case, one morning we received a polite letter from one of the boys, asking if he and some friends—"how many could we do with?"—could come and look round the game farm. Apparently they are given a day off each term on which to visit an industry or trade of some kind, after which they have to write a report on it. The writer realised, of course, that gamefarming was not exactly an "industry," but he and his friends were all very interested in birds and would like to see a pheasant farm, how it was run, and so on.

One at the Local

We considered the request and finally decided that they might come, partly, it is true, because two of our staff are old boys of this particular school. We said we could "do with six"—not more—that they must bring their own picnic lunch, and that we could not in any way entertain them, the proposed date of their visit being during the very busy season.

They came, accompanied, as it so turned out, by the father of one of them, and apparently enjoyed themselves immensely. Indeed, they insisted on us joining them for a drink at the local inn before lunch—a gesture much appreciated. We hope that they wrote up a favourable account of their impressions of gamefarming, for—who knows?—as a result of this visit a gamefarmer of the future may have been born. But here I would hasten to add that we do not make a habit of entertaining schools. This was just an exception, and we are *not* "open to the public."

Clients From Overseas

We are always pleased to see customers, old and new, and any clients from overseas. If the latter do not speak our language, well, we always seem to get along somehow, often to the considerable amusement of both parties, and so far, no disastrous mistakes in orders have occured as a result of a misunderstanding of language.

Before Christmas, we have weeded out from our pens a few pheasants which are not quite perfect enough for sending away, or good enough for our own breeding stock. They are known as "the crocks"—a great exaggeration, really, for to the outsider there does not appear to be anything wrong with them. Only *we* know that perhaps the tail feathers of one bird have not grown properly, or in another a wing may be slightly malformed, or the plumage not correct, and so forth. But although, alive, they may not be perfect, when plucked and trussed and suitably garnished, they are worthy to grace any table at Christmas time.

Traditional Celebration

It is with these birds that we like to "remember" our friends and acquaintances, neighbouring farmers and others who have perhaps allowed us a right-of-way across their land, or cut a bit of hay for us, or co-operated with us in some way or another. So, in December, we prepare a short list of those whom we must not forget, and about a week or so before Christmas one of our sheds bears a slight resemblance to a poulterer's shop, though only to a very minor degree, for we do not have many "crocks" to dispose of.

Also connected with the festive season, is a celebration which has become traditional on the gamefarm—our own little party in the office before lunch on Christmas Eve, when we all foregather to drink to the spirit of Christmas. A short speech follows by the managing director, and is replied to by the foreman, though "speech" is far too formal a word for this friendly gathering—"a few words appropriate to the occasion" would be better. Then feeling, we hope, pleasantly mellow and in a mood of goodwill towards all men, we disperse for lunch, taking with us, most of us at least, our Christmas dinners—our own share from the "crocks" pen.

Clay Pigeon Shooting

Fixture List

Jan. 7: Alston G.C., Blue Bell Hotel, Alston, Cumberland. President's Cup event, 1 p.m.

March 23: Annual General Meeting of the C.P.S.A., Grosvenor Hotel, Victoria, London, S.W.1, 3.30 p.m.

March 24: Bowland & District G.C., Sawley, Clitheroe, Lancs. Open shoot.

* * *

Reports and Results

The Wetherby and District Gun Club wish to thank all the competitors in the West Riding Championships and their friends for their support and to wish them, and all shooters a Prosperous New Year.

Preliminary arrangements have been made for the 1956 Championship Meeting for which the prize money has again been increased to well over £100. Of the money allocated to the Championships the champions will each receive £10 and the remainder will be divided into three classes, each class receiving three prizes.

* * *

SKEET

It has been decided by the Executive Committee of the C.P.S.A. that as from January 1, and until further notice, normal 7-Station Skeet shall be reverted to as the standard practice for all skeet competitions held under the auspices of the C.P.S.A., and a normal round of skeet will once again consist of 14 singles and 3 pairs of doubles (20 birds in all).

The Rules for Skeet as laid down in the C.P.S.A. Handbook before the introduction of "Modified Skeet" will therefore again come into operation on January 1, 1956.

Whilst the British Open Skeet Championship and the C.P.S.A. Skeet League will be held under the normal 7-Station rules, clubs holding Area and County Championships may, for 1956, decide for themselves whether to adopt these rules for their own Championships or hold them under "Modified Skeet" conditions (10 singles and 5 pairs of doubles, omitting Stations 1 and 7).

Those clubs wishing to retain "Modified Skeet" for their own Area or County Championship(s) are requested to notify the Hon. Secretary of the C.P.S.A. when applying to hold the competition(s) in question.

C.P.S.A. "Skeet 20" medals, and I.C.I. Marksmanship Badges for 20, 40 and 60 straight, will continue to be available for either method, during 1956.

It has also been decided that Rule 2 (Number of Cartridges in Gun) shall be amended, as follows:

"During the shooting of single targets, the Management may permit the loading of two cartridges in the gun at each station. Between singles at each station, the Shooter must return to the "Gun Down" position.

"In the case of automatic or pump guns, not more than two cartridges shall be placed in the gun at any time."

Rule 11 (Safety First)—Section (c) has been deleted.

DOWN-THE-LINE

It has been decided by the Executive Committee of the C.P.S.A. that the following amendments shall be made to the Rules for Down-the-Line Shooting:

Rule 12 (Guns and Loads) Section (c) to be amended to read:

"A re-loaded cartridge, or a gun, or a cartridge after it has misfired in any stage of the competition. The competitor must abide by the result if he uses such (see Rule 9(b)).

The following paragraph (e) to be added after (d)—"Barrel Attachments, etc."

"(e) A competitor shall *not* be allowed at any time to load more than two cartridges in the gun."

* * *

Fixture List of Major Events, 1956

IN ENGLAND

May 4 & 5: 24th Annual British Open Sporting Championship, West London Shooting Grounds, Northolt, Greenford, Middlesex. Organised by the Clay Pigeon Shooting Association (Hon. Secretary, Mr. H. Rogers, 276 Whitchurch Lane, Edgware, Middlesex).

June 1 & 2: 53rd Annual English Open Down-the-Line Championship Meeting, Harrogate Shooting Grounds, Penny Pot Lane, Harrogate, Yorkshire. Organised by the Clay Pigeon Shooting Association (Hon. Secretary, Mr. H. Rogers, 276 Whitchurch Lane, Edgware, Middlesex).

July 9-21: National Rifle Association's 87th Annual Imperial Meeting, Bisley Camp, Brookwood, Woking, Surrey. Daily Clay Pigeon Shooting events and practice (except Sunday, July 15).

July 28: 15th Annual British Open Skeet Championship, Ampthill Road, Elstow, Bedford (Bedford & District Gun Club Ground). Organised by the Clay Pigeon Shooting Association (Hon. Secretary, Mr. H. Rogers, 276 Whitchurch Lane, Edgware, Middlesex).

IN SCOTLAND

June 9: Scottish Grand Final and Open Events, Whitehouse Farm, Stirling (Central Scotland Gun Club ground). Organised by the Scottish Clay Pigeon Association (Hon. Secretary, Mr. P. Stewart, 1 Forth Crescent, Stirling).

IN WALES

May 11 & 12: Welsh Open Championship Meeting, Rhosesmor, Mold, Flintshire (North Wales Gun Club ground). Organised by the Welsh Clay Pigeon Shooting Association (Hon. Secretary, Mr. S. C. Miles, J.P., Meiros, Treherbert, Glamorgan).

June 22 & 23: 22nd Annual International Tournament, Ely Racecourse, Cardiff. Team matches between England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, with Australia and New Zealand shooting by post; and British Open Individual Championship. Under the auspices of the Welsh Clay Pigeon Shooting Association (Hon. Secretary, Mr. S. C. Miles, J.P., Meiros, Treherbert, Glamorgan).

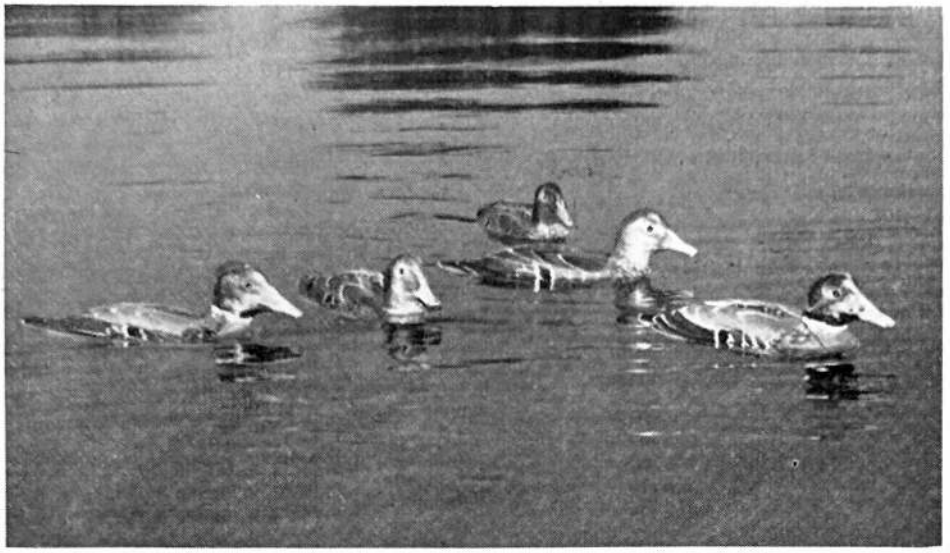
Wildfowling Clubs

At the Ship Hotel dining room Llangefin on December 13 a very well attended meeting of The Anglesey Wildfowlers' Association was held under the chairmanship of Mr. Grove-White the Club's vice-chairman.

The guest speaker, a very prominent and well-known ornithologist from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, whom viewers will have seen on TV, was Mr. Ron Murton who was the sole survivor of the South Goodwin lightship disaster last winter, and who at that time, it will be remembered, was studying the migration of birds. Mr. Murton spoke in detail on the feeding, migration and many other aspects of the woodpigeon and in particular of narcotics. Many questions were asked, and Mr. Murton was ever ready with his very able replies and explanations.

Mr. H. Lord, the chief county pests officer, also spoke, and gave details of how, in future, cheap cartridges for pigeon and pest destruction could be acquired through the Anglesey Wildfowlers' Club, this being necessary through the Agriculture Pest Department having given up the issue of cheap cartridges.

At the conclusion of a most entertaining evening, Dr. David Williams of Four-Mile Bridge, extended a very hearty vote of thanks to Mr. Murton, Mr. Lord, and all who had helped to make the meeting such a success. It is well to note that, at the time of writing, the 80 mark has been reached of paid-up members.



The fifth column afloat. All the decoys are attached to a light metal frame.

The Young Shot

Duck and Disappointment

by Petrel

I VERY seldom refuse an invitation to shoot pheasants. I very seldom get one, which is a good enough reason in itself, apart from the fact that I enjoy a covert shoot and all that it implies. So when I do decline, there has to be some rather special reason and if you can think of a better one than duck, then you are not the sort of shooter that I think you are.

There is a tendency these days, especially amongst the younger generation, for shooters to turn up their noses at pheasants and proclaim their preference for duck, but this trend is often born of necessity, for pheasant shooting on the sort of scale that makes it really worthwhile is now beyond the ken of most of us. My own experience of big days at pheasants as they used to be is nil, but I have had some better-than-average days which can be classed as by no means small judged by present-day standards. All the same, if it comes to a ballot between pheasants and duck, I have no doubt at all about which will win my vote.

Provided that you have the birds, which is not very difficult to arrange, you can shoot pheasants, in small or large numbers at any time. It is not always so easy to guarantee results with duck, especially when you have to rely on wild birds and the rare occasions on the rough shoot when conditions are just right for them. Saturday was one of those days, and so confident was I of success that I 'phoned a friend and asked him to share what could hardly fail to be a first-class flight.

"Look," I enthused excitedly, as soon as he answered, "it's rained for four days; the fifteen-acre's half-flooded; it's bound to be full of snipe, and as for the duck, I can count up to three dozen from the train window every morning. Can you come?"

Preliminary Preparations

"Darn it," he replied, "I was just about to ring you and ask the same question. We've got to shoot some pheasants for Christmas presents and want another gun. How about it?" Then as an afterthought, which made me very glad that I'd got in first, "The only thing is, I doubt whether there'll be a bird in it for you, judging by the number we want." But I had decided long before that, and we wished each other luck in our separate ventures. Who came off best you shall quickly hear and judge.

Half the enjoyment of any shooting expedition stems from the preliminary preparations, especially when duck shooting or wildfowling, for both require a little more thought in the initial stages than that demanded by more formal occasions. The gun was wiped quite free of oil, inside and out. If it is left oily it makes a mess of already messy clothes and is too slippery for easy handling, and if you use the same oil as I do and get caught in the rain, an off-white line appears on both sides of the rib. Cartridges were carefully selected —7s for snipe and 5s for duck—and tried in the chamber—*out of doors*—in case they had swollen in the damp atmosphere caused by the recent rainy weather. Decoys were dug out and checked, a sack to camouflage the hound went into the car boot along with a dry towel on which to dry him afterwards, and parka and gum boots were donned.

A Number of Decoys

A friend of a friend of mine has a theory about decoys, particularly in the case of pigeon. There is, he maintains a minimum number which it is necessary to put out for the successful attraction of pigeon. Below that number the wild birds are just not interested, and it is unnecessary to go far beyond the minimum. He puts this necessary minimum at about a dozen dummies.

As far as pigeon are concerned I am convinced that the more decoys you set up, the better will be their drawing power, and if I wanted proof, I should quote the case of another friend who puts out between one hundred and one hundred and fifty decoys whenever he is shooting pigeon seriously. His bags, made with a double .410 and No. 7 shot, justify his methods, and I would add that most of his birds are shot not coming in close to his decoys but well out on their way in to the set, which is arranged some way out of range all round his hide.

As far as duck are concerned, I am quite satisfied that the absolute minimum number of decoys required for consistent results is three, and I look at the question in the same light as I believe a duck might look at it. One decoy is suspicious, most probably it is a pricked bird, and therefore, open to danger. Two decoys, especially if, as a majority of gunners arrange them they are duck and drake, are company and one more is a crowd. Three or more imply communal interest and safety in numbers, which is why any number over three is my idea of good duck decoying.

With all the other essentials packed, I thought about my portable hide. I looked twice at it, surveyed the weather, and left it behind. And that, as it turned out, proved to be my fatal mistake.

The Portable Hide

The day dawned foggy. By midday it was even foggier and the forecast foretold even thicker fog. How was I, who live on the high ground, to guess that in the valley, where the river and canal help to ensure that any fog will be a real pea-souper, there would be three fields completely clear of mist and that one of them would be my fifteen-acre flooded water-meadow.

We did our best, but the snipe were wild as hawks and unapproachable. As daylight turned to dusk, the dog and I crouched in the open beneath a drab and blending gas cape, but the forty or so mallard that wanted to pitch in the field circled laughingly just out of range until we moved off, when from a distance we watched them glide in safely to the dibble. If I had not been quite so cocksure; if I had taken the hide; if the fog had thickened if . . . but that is the sort of thing that makes duck shooting so much more of a gamble than pheasant shooting, so much more uncertain—and so maddening. My neighbour 'phoned in the evening with the news that they had ended up two short of their required pheasant total, and laughed when I told him of my doings. Never mind; I shall laugh last in time. As I told him, and knowing his coverts, there was no excuse for any failure on his part, whereas I was at least backing an unknown quantity. I'm still not sorry I refused his invitation, for there's always next week and, I'm happy to say, it's raining again.

With better things in view, I have spent an hour or so constructing a new, portable hide which should prove more effective than my old, single-fronted ambush.

From a derelict hen-run I stripped about fifteen feet of wire netting, four foot high. Doubling this in half, I packed it with hay—part of the recompense for a hot summer day's haymaking, but refused by the hunter gourmet in the family—and bent over and "sewed up" with a length of wire the edges. Along its length, here and there, I slipped the two netting sides together, through the hay, with short pieces of wire, to prevent the grass from shifting I now have a light, thick portable hide which can be rolled up into next to no bulk, and which supported on sticks will surround in comfortable concealment one man and his dog squatting on a duck board. A piece of camouflaged netting across the top completes the illusion and is instantly removable, while a small gap in one side, at the end posts allows for entrance and easy exit of the retriever.

Forthcoming Field Trials

Jan. 6: Southern and Western Counties Field Trial Society. (Novice Stake.) Sutton Manor. Judges: Mr. J. Arthur Rank, Lady Hill Wood and Mr. J. C. S. Charles. Secretary: R. F. H. Cowen, Sutton Manor Estate Office, Sutton Scotney, Winchester, Hants.

Jan. 12: Gamekeepers' Flat-Coat Retriever Club. Judges: Mr. H. A. Ruffell, Mr. W. D. Edwards and Mr. R. Howard. Secretary: Mrs. G. Murray Grover, Hillside, Ashampstead, near Reading, Berks.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Editor welcomes letters, and photographs relating to them, for this page. They should be as brief as possible, and the names and addresses of senders must be given, though these need not necessarily be published.

THE 2-SHOT AUTOMATIC

Sir,—With reference to the article by "North Country" (issue December 9) under the heading "Gun Gossip" concerning the new Browning 2-shot automatic gun. I would like to correct the impression that supplies of this weapon have not yet started in this country, for several small deliveries have been made to various traders and the writer had the pleasure of shooting an advance model some months ago, a report of which appeared in the form of a letter in your correspondence columns in August last.

"North Country" is certainly correct in saying that the shooter is less conscious of the movement of the mechanism and of the recoil, the lack of this being most noticeable on firing the weapon, with obvious advantage to a shooter firing a large number of shots. Dismantling of barrel is most certainly a rapid operation, as is the replacing of same, and the balance leaves very little to be desired.

The new streamlined action body also gives the gun a pleasing finish. I have found it to function perfectly with something over two thousand shots fired to date.

L. H. Willis,
Woodchurch, Kent.

THROW OUT THE RABBITS BILL

Sir,—Lord Merthyr has sponsored a private Bill to prohibit the re-stocking of land with wild rabbits. The Minister of Agriculture will endeavour to rush this Bill on to the Statute Book with the utmost speed. It is a dead-letter already—a fore-doomed waste of Parliamentary time. Do Lord Merthyr, or Mr. Heathcote-Amory imagine that any law can stop a rabbit crossing a field or going through a hedge? Who is to say that a man has re-stocked his land with wild rabbits, when they can cross practically a n y barrier, including rivers?

This Bill is a monstrous invasion of the rights of the individual to do what he pleases with his own property. It is also a direct encouragement for paid informers, official snoopers, and mischief-makers to use the rabbit either as a fresh excuse for more unproducitve bureaucrats, or to work off petty feuds and vendettas against their neighbours.

We have had enough "official" interference with the balance of nature. The loss of the rabbit has meant the annual loss of £15½ million pounds worth of meat, skins, fur-felt, and other by-products. It has dealt the death blow to the high quality hat trade. It has robbed country housewives of endless free meat, and it now means increased raids on poultry, lambs, song birds, and game by foxes and other vermin.

I hope that everyone with a love of nature, who has the future of the countryside at heart, will immediately ask his or her M.P. to throw out this ridiculous Bill.

Has Lord Merthyr considered that his Bill sets an extremely dangerous precedent? Any Government could follow it with a Bill to prohibit the rearing of pheasants, wild duck, or partridges—the latter bird now a comparative r a r i t y thanks to "scientific" methods of factory-farming.

Soon we shall have a Bill to prohibit the singing of sky-larks, lest they disturb the slumbers of Government bureaucrats, or a ban on the gulls on Thames-side, lest they interrupt the ineptitudes of our Parliamentary meddlers with nature.

Lord Merthyr is like Canute, who imagined that he could halt the tide.

J. Wentworth Day,
Ingatestone, Essex.

EGG-STEALING MAGPIE

Sir,—While parked on the road-side, I obtained this snapshot through one of the car windows.

Shortly afterwards a farmer friend passed by. "Did you see that magpie get up?" he asked. "It seems to be quite tame. I saw the blighter, and I will get him one day. He has been spending a lot of time in a tree in the garden lately. It now appears one of my fowls has been laying in the hedge. As soon as the hen leaves the nest, it darts down and takes the egg before I or the wife, can get there."

A. Kay,
Birmingham.

Snapped from the window of a parked car. (See letter "Egg-Stealing Magpie.")

DACHSHUND CATCHING A PARTRIDGE

Sir,—A few days ago, I was exercising six of my dogs, four gundogs, a Lakeland puppy, and Sausage, my dachshund bitch.

It was rather a windy morning and as we approached a tall, blind fence, Sausage, in front as usual, went through into the next field, a clover ley, first. Exactly what happened I don't know but we found her 25 yards out in the stubble worrying an old cock partridge. The stubble was not longer than five inches at the most, so how she had managed to get within striking distance remains a mystery.

The partridge was in perfect condition and I am certain it was the old cock of a covey of ten as I have since noticed this covey is one bird short, therefore it is strange that every member of the covey should have been facing the wrong way, as must have been the case.

Of course, the covey was probably nesting, with the old cock several yards to one side and he, owing to the wind did not hear the dog approach. The wind being in the bitch's favour, she probably drew up within a yard or so of him and then sprang—yes, a dachshund can spring, if it comes from the Hollyhill pack and receives plenty of exercise.

I feel that such a capture on such bare ground is most unusual—a pheasant in a hedgerow or tucked into the straw of a combined stubble being an entirely different matter to such a keen nosed little hunter.

Cervus,
Lincs.

Photograph of a bag made by three guns—we take it—and rejected as a cover picture! (See letter, "Cover Picture.")

MASSACRE OF QUAIL

Sir,—I am sending you a newspaper cutting which I read today. I am disgusted with it. In my opinion this is another case of trigger-happy gunmen who call themselves sportsmen. *This is not sport; it is downright slaughter.*

I sincerely hope this practice will never be carried out in the British Isles. What are other readers views on the subject?

Trevor S. West
(Aged 16 years),
Wellingborough, Northants.

[Thank you for cutting, printed below. We do not think that you need worry about this sort of thing taking place in the British Isles. The British sportsman is made of different stuff!—Ed.]

Tape-recorders are causing a massacre of quail and other birds in Italy. They play bird-mating songs and draw swarms into shooting range.

CLUB SHOOTING

Sir,—I have been a constant reader of *The Shooting Times* for the past two years, and, through it, joined The North Cheshire Wildfowlers' Association. On December 3, we had an invitation from the Dee Wildfowlers' Association to shoot over their ground.

I was really delighted with the arrangements that were made for us, but, best of all, on my very first expedition I was lucky enough to bag one mallard drake. Believe me, more shooting men should join these types of clubs. My friend and I, up till then, had always shot together, but never have we had a more enjoyable time.

W. Ernest Sutcliffe,
Stockport.

ON COOKING WIGEON

Sir,—Could any of your readers tell me how to cook wigeon, so that they do not taste like seaweed?

I would also appreciate a good recipe for cooking hares.

F. A. Huddart,
Soutergate, Ulverston.

COVER PICTURE

Sir,—The excellent photographic reproduction which graces the cover of your superb journal (issue December 2), leaves no doubt in our minds, that the bitch concerned has a good reason to keep an eye on the camera, as she obviously feels completely ashamed of the whole situation.

It would appear that Lord Carrington's labrador has not even had to get her feet muddy in order to retrieve the handfed mallard which is, if possible, even drier than the bitch.

Further, it should be noted that the surrounding terrain bears no resemblance to the sort of country which the official organ of W.A.G.B.I. advises us to be suitable for the successful apprehension of wildfowl.

A succession of eminently more suitable illustrations, such as the enclosed, can be forwarded (upon the receipt of adequate reward) for the future adornment of your otherwise excellent cover page.

Flying Fowler,
Skarpsno,
B.A.O.R.

["Flying Fowler" we have not met, but "Skarpsno" we recognise as a certain bird-watcher-cum-fowler with his roots in Sussex. Both our correspondents should now be aware of our explosive attitude towards critics of our cover pictures! In this case, we would point out that not all duck are shot over mud or water, but, often enough, on stubble or grass, and any dog which retrieves them will therefore remain dry. As to the "sample" cover picture, reproduced above—What a bag! What action! Had we used it, we would have captioned it "Still Life!"—Ed.]

New Books

Air Guns and Air Pistols (Cassell, 11s. 6d.). This is the first book to be published (and it is fully illustrated with photographic reproductions of many kinds of air weapons, and with sketches) devoted entirely to air weapons. The author is, by trade, a specialist in the field, and the information on all aspects of these weapons can be relied upon as authorative.

He starts by explaining the classification of the various types of air weapons, and then deals, one by one, with specific types, including such categories as walking-stick pneumatic rifles, spring-operated air-pistols, pneumatic pistols and gas-rifles. Final chapters cover such general information as the laws governing the use of air-rifles, hints on buying and selling, and the care, maintenance and repair of a prized possession. A full-page review of this book appeared in *The Shooting Times* on July 15, 1955.

Bird Navigation, by G. V. T. Matthews (Cambridge University Press, 12s. 6d.). This is No. 3 Volume of Cambridge Monographs in Experimental Biology, and maintains the high scientific standard of its predecessors, and will interest zoologists and physiologists, geo-physicists and practical navigators. At the same time, it should be equally interesting, in the clarity of its presentation to laymen interested in the movement of birds.

A Manx shearwater, taken across the Atlantic and released more than 3,000 miles from its nest, was back on its egg within 12½ days. How did it find its way? Dr. Matthews has spent several years investigating this ability of birds to return home, both after migration and after experimental dispersement. He now marshals and reviews the mass of observations and experiments to set forth the present understanding of bird navigation. Fully illustrated with diagrams.

Change in the Village, by George Bourne (Duckworth, 10s. 6d.). First published in 1912, and re-printed at intervals of years, this book is an accurate, sympathetic, and wholly unsentimental analysis of the ways and thoughts of village men and women. Its like, in this respect, has never been equalled. It was written when the author was fifty years of age, and he died in 1927. Its value as a rural record remains today, since the changes which Mr. Bourne (Bourne being the author's pen-name, taken from the Surrey heathland village where he lived), so well describes are still working themselves out in many a country village throughout Great Britain. He hoped—giving good and sound reasons for that hope—that a new and better, a more secure, rural civilisation might eventually emerge from the period of transition, and this hope has been almost amply justified in the passing of the years.

Every true countryman should read this book, for it encourages profound thought on matters near and dear to his heart. In this edition appears a new critical introduction by Geoffrey Grigson, including some facts about the author's life and background.

The Singing Forest, by H. Mortimer Batten (Blackwood, 12s. 6d.) This is an attractive story of the life of a red deer in the Highlands, told by an author who is well-known as an observant, first-class naturalist, and who never makes the far too common mistake of endowing his animals with human characteristics. Their actions and reactions are purely animal and true to life.

Corrie, the red deer of this story, undergoes all the vicissitudes and survives the dangers of his kind. In his never-ending search for food he travels alone, or with the herds, from swamp to moor, from river-side to the barren lands by the sea. Some of the scenes are beautiful, some tragic, but all are real and alive. A book-end map of the country covered, and well-drawn chapter-headings illustrate this most entertaining book.

Dwellers in Darkness, by S. H. Skaife (Longman Green, 25s.). The only creatures on this earth, besides man, that have learned to live together and co-operate in highly-organised communities are the social insects—ants, bees, wasps, and termites. As a social animal, man has been in existence for less than one million years; ants, bees, and wasps for about seventy million years; and termites for something like two hundred million years. Although known as "white ants," they are neither ants nor white. For countless generations they have lived inside their fortress homes. The rays of the sun never reach them; no rain ever falls upon them. They are literally "dwellers in darkness," shut off from the outside world. They can survive only when crowded together in dense throngs. No solitary termites are known, although there are 1,861 living and 68 fossil species known to science. Only a very small privileged number of the vast population of a mound ever comes into the light of day.

This introduction to the study of termites is a book of extraordinary interest, very fully illustrated with first-class photographs and sketches. It gives an enthralling picture of the teeming life of the colonies, and describes in great detail the experiments by means of which their lives are recorded. It is a book which will enlighten and excite the layman, for it is one of the most interesting we have read concerning any insect.

A Few Gypsies, by Rupert Croft-Cooke (Putnam, 12s. 6d.). Pleasantly illustrated with drawings by Peter Emmerich, this book, by a well-known author, deals with various aspects of gypsy lore, and puts forward some theories drawn from his own intuition and experience of Romany ways.

Mr. Croft-Cooke, in his series of essays, tells of traditions of their music and singing; of superstition and convention about love, marriage, and death; of the art of dukkering and the possessiveness, pride, and cunning generally of an ancient and mysterious race.

The Popular Boxer, by Elizabeth Somerfield (Popular Dogs Publishing Co., 12s. 6d.). Here is the long-awaited and much needed authoritative book on an increasingly popular breed, a book which will guide the beginner and stimulate the experienced breeder.

There can be no greater expert in this country on the boxer than the author, and in this well-written and fully informative book, everything anyone wants to know about the breed is recorded. Moreover, it is illustrated with 45 excellent photographs.

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Gun Gossip

by North Country

AT this time, if a gun is required for next season, it is always a good idea to consider the purchase of a secondhand weapon. I have found that, as January runs on, there are more weapons and a larger selection to choose from, in the secondhand market. One of the best guns in my possession was obtained at the end of the season, and at a price which today would seem ridiculous. That gun is still as good as ever, despite the fact that it was *made* well over fifty years ago.

If you happen to be a gun expert, to get what you want should be a comparatively easy matter. But for the ordinary layman there are many "snags," and if you are not buying from a well-known firm of repute it is always a sound safeguard to have your prospective weapon "vetted" by an established and recognised gunmaker. This is well worth a small fee, and it may save you a lot of trouble (and possibly expense) later on.

Very bad pits are clear enough for all to see, but smaller pits, particularly if they are located well up the barrel may escape the notice of the inexperienced eye. There may too be rusting under the rib, and if shallow pits happen to be on the rib side of the bore, the barrel wall may already be weakened in this quarter. Because wet and damp cannot be so easily wiped off it has got under the rib, it may be left undisturbed to cause rust. For readers who do not know the tip, a piece of blotting paper I can say is useful and effective for absorbing wet which has run under the rib. I always carry some in my gun case and run it along by the rib after shooting in the rain.

A Matter of Price

Good secondhand guns rightly deserve good prices. Yet if you are content to use a gun that is not quite standard in some respect, you may find that you can obtain a perfectly effective weapon for its job and at a cost that will save the pocket. Last year, for instance, I came across a rather heavy plain non-ejector 12-bore, fully choked in both barrels, which seemed to me to be splendid value at the price. I do not say it was the sort of gun I would recommend for an elderly man—it was too heavy and solid. But for a younger man for rough or mixed shooting it seemed to me to be suitable. The choke could have been adjusted to any boring at a small additional cost. Had I wanted another gun at the time, I would have bought it at the price asked. The best way to procure a suitable gun is to study the advertisements of this journal. This allows plenty of choice.

The Burned Glove

A Cheltenham reader is interested in my Turkish friend's activities. He writes: "Some weeks ago the gentleman who writes you from Turkey told us that his gun had become so hot that it burned his glove. Surely this must be very injurious to the gun, although it is a first quality one? I noticed that nobody seemed to ask this question. I have myself noticed that when hot the metal of one's gun tends to swell, and so not to open and shut so easily." Perhaps my Turkish friend would like to add his comments before anything more is said on the subject. I will, however, assure the reader that the gun in question is a first-class one. I have seen and handled it—it is indeed a lovely specimen.

A Staffordshire reader writes that to a certain extent he shares with me the taste for a number of guns. He goes on to say that his favourite weapon is a hammerless ejector 16-bore, bored half and full choke. "This gun," he writes, "kills cleanly and consistently at ranges of forty to fifty yards. I have found it equal to any 12-bore I have handled." I do not think any of us will wish to challenge this statement. A well-choked 16 is good for anything — a splendid gun, especially for our type of shooting. Anyone who has shot on the Continent, as I have, will know what a 16 can do. I often wonder why we do not see more in use over here.

It is, I know, necessary to have these guns choked rather more than the standard 12-bore —which reduces the killing circle. But this is a small matter. And, anyway, a little less latitude for aiming can be an advantage. Some very good shots use 16-bores and make superb shooting with them. A 16 is undoubtedly the answer to many questions—contemporary ones. Yet there is nothing new about it. There was not much the older generation of gunmakers and shooters did not realise.

Odd Accidents

A survey of odd accidents, published by the American National Safety Council, tells of a man being shot by a fish. It was Bobby Bright, of Gonzales, Texas, who was shot by a freshly caught catfish that flopped round so much in the boat that it struck the trigger of his rifle. Another accident quoted was of a rabbit near Grand Forks, North Dakota, which leaped up and hit the propeller of a crop-dusting plane. The aeroplane was forced to land.

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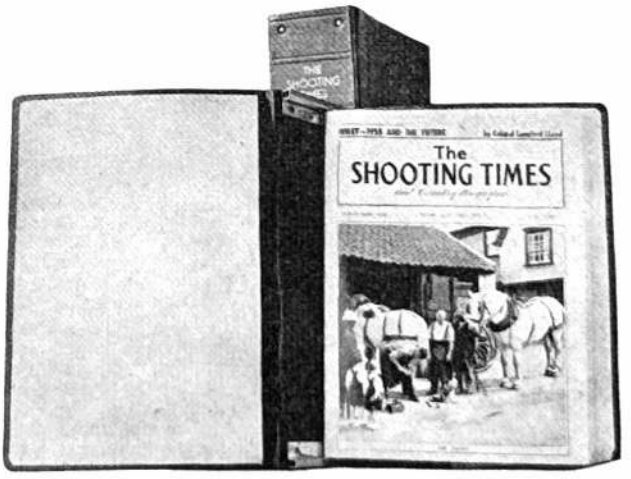

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Gundog News

Conducted by P. R. A. MOXON, Herne Common, Herne Bay, Kent

THE Retriever Championship Stake briefly reported in my notes last week) was held this year at Sandringham by gracious permission of H.M. the Queen, on December 6, 7 and 8 The judges were Messrs. Vincent Routledge and J. Arthur Rank and the Earl of Northesk. A telegram was sent to the Queen in these terms: "With humble duty the President and Members of the International Gundog League extend their very deep appreciation of the gracious favour accorded to them by Your Majesty allowing the Retriever Championship to take place at Sandringham. Assuring you of their devoted loyalty at all times.—J. Arthur Rank." To this telegram the following reply was received. "Please convey my warm thanks to the members of the International Gundog League for their kind message of greeting. I send my best wishes for the success of the Field Trial.—Elizabeth, R."

The weather was fine and dry, though cold, on all three days, which were held at Anmer, Flitcham and Wolferton. I was unable to attend the meeting personally owing to a hand injury, but the following eye-witness report will be of interest to readers.

At the Retriever Championship at Sandringham. Left to right: Brig. R. F. S. Gooch, Miss A. Busuttil, Miss B. A. Mackinlay and Mr. P. Ellis.

No ground could be better for the retriever championship. Plenty of game, consisting mostly of pheasants, some partridges, and woodcock. The first day was in bracken and scrub; the second day in root fields; on the third day there was a small river to cross and tall rushes to work in. The trial was very well planned and organised by Capt. W. A. Fellowes and Mr Dodds, the headkeeper.

On the first day the judges gave each dog three retrieves and were only just able to get through the card of 23 dogs. It was pleasing to see so many owner-handlers in the finals, and also the second and third dogs were owner-bred as well. The card included five field trial champions and four of these were in the awards which shows they had deserved their titles. It seems that there were only about three dogs that had the test to falling game when out hunting, in other words being shot over. One of these fell to the temptation and was eliminated. In the last drive the judges worked the dogs singly—all three judges watching one dog at a time. This made it a very slow and very cold wait while the dogs were worked—some dogs working ages after a bird had fallen.

A Tiring Three Days

On the whole, all dogs worked well in the difficult ground, but except for the dogs in the awards the work was not high-class; although several flattered for a while they soon fell away. Dogs seemed to be left down hunting for very long periods and seemed to delay the rest from getting any work to do. Three days is a long time to keep handlers and dogs waiting for their turn to pick what seemed an average of about ten birds.

The stake was won by Major Hugh Peacock's owner-handled labrador F.T.Ch. Greatford Teal. This keen dog worked well all through the trial, setting a good score on a running woodcock after another dog had been tried and finding several other birds on the first day. On the second day he had two birds which he gathered with ease. In the final run, over the water he found both birds he was sent for, showing drive, style and willingness to handler, and wiping the eye of another dog Runner-up was Mrs. June Atkinson's golden retriever F.TCh. Mazurka of Wynford, also owner handled. A kind, easy going dog, a good retriever and always keen to obey his handler. Failed on a strong runner on the second day. On the last test he had his eye wiped by Brackenbank Merry but later he found a bird after three dogs had been down, and one of these was Merry. Third prize went to Mr. R. E. Burton's owner handled labrador F.T.Ch. Brackenbank Merry. He went very well the first day, getting a long runner and other birds. On the second day he found a far-out towered bird in splendid style, but his last bird of the day—an easy one—he failed to collect, and had his eye wiped. On the final test he got a good far-out bird but failed on another. He handles well at all times but seems to prefer far out birds to the near ones.

A Pleasing Worker

Reserve prize went to Mrs. B. Harcourt Wood's labrador Norham Blackie, handled by G. Meldrum. A pleasing worker, had nothing difficult to do the first and second day, but showed style and drive on the final test. She failed several times, but found her last bird really well. Diploma went to the Hon. Lady Hill Wood's labrador F.T.Ch. Hiwood Gypsey, handled by Miss Anne Hill-Wood. Did excellent work on the first day, wiping a dog's eye in bracken, and getting two more birds easily. On the second day she failed on a strong runner which was never found. At the final test she failed twice but got her last bird well. Diploma to Mrs. J. R. Atkinson's Holway Melody-maker of Wynford, a golden retriever handled by Mr. M. Atkinson. This reliable gamefinder did all that was asked of her but her retrieving is rather slow, and her pick-up also. She was in the final run-off but failed to get her bird on the far side of the rushes.

A diploma was granted to Mr. J. S. Purbrick's labrador Strattonley Squire, handled by Reg Hill. A nice going dog with good style and drive. On the first day he did all that was asked of him, but on the final run he did not keep up his form and failed.

Dogs for Wildfowling

One of the most frequent questions which crops up in my correspondence is "What is the best breed of gundog for water work and wildfowling?". Now this is a query which requires very careful consideration, for a great deal depends upon the *type* of water work and also upon what other work the dog will be called upon to perform. For marsh shooting and general rough work I never have have any hesitation in recommending a springer spaniel of *working* type — the small, energetic, thrusting field trial type dog which will not only face cover and water but retrieves as to the manner born. Although I have never been a wildfowler —the sort of man who thrives on very cold weather on the open saltings, or crouching under sea-walls—I have done my fair share of marsh shooting, and for this purpose I always found a good springer very effective. For working in reeds and rushes and questing every inch of the difficult ground they cannot be equalled, and specialised training and practice will turn one of these dogs into masterpieces of efficiency.

However, where strong tidal waters are to be tackled, and where colour is a matter of importance and retrieving pure and simple is the main requirement, then you cannot go wrong with a good labrador. These dogs are famous for their water-loving qualities, and their efficiency in that element if from a good-swimming strain. I have had labradors which were water shy, and others which never be-

Mr. J. S. Watts (left) and Mr. F. Bell at the Retriever Championship at Sandringham.

came very proficient in it, but possibly some of these cases would have improved with more practice and opportunity. The great thing seems to be to have a dog of the best type for your particular work, and if you are a wildfowler and nothing else then you should not go far wrong if you chose a labrador *of working strain.*

There are other breeds to be considered, of course. The golden retriever can lay claim to great qualities in water—again if it comes of the right stock—and some of the best dogs in water that I have seen have been of this breed. However, the light colour might prove a drawback, and the longer coats mean that they carry more water and do not dry out as quickly as do labradors.

I have frequently heard complaints that golden retrievers are "soft" dogs and will not face water on a cold day nor tackle the sticky, difficult places as well as a labrador. In many instances, I regret to say, these complaints are fully justified, but there is "a black sheep in every fold," and I have no doubt that a lot of labradors could be accused of just the same things. Much depends upon training and the opportunities given to the dog to work under these conditions, but far, far more depends upon breeding and strain. A good golden retriever from sound working stock is no less likely to let you down than a labrador, but if you choose one from show or "pet" stock then you have only yourself to blame if things go wrong.

Flatcoats are quite good dogs in water, and curlies and Irish water spaniels are excellent. However, all three breeds are comparatively rare, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain puppies of pure working stock. There are some about, I know, but they are hard to come by, and as the popularity of the breeds fade so do their working abilities. More is the pity. Irish water spaniels are not the easiest of dogs to train and handle, being self-willed and stubborn unless very tactfully treated. Flatcoats are easy to handle but their long coats are a disadvantage as with golden retrievers, and, sad to relate, the working qualities of the breed seem to have deteriorated greatly over the last twenty years.

Curly-coated retrievers are even harder to come by than flatcoats, and though they possess many of the same features of the Irish water spaniel, they are on the large side and (so rumour has it) inclined to be hard in the mouth. I have not owned or trained enough curlies to be able to give a definite opinion on this subject. Devotees of the breed tell me that it is all nonsense, whilst their detractors will give instance after instance of crimes committed by curlies in this respect. I remain sitting on the fence as far as this topic goes.

Chesapeake Bay Retrievers

Chesapeake Bay retrievers are first-class water dogs, widely used in the States for wildfowling. However, I do not think there can be many of this breed in the country, and I have never trained or handled one, so here again I cannot speak with authority. But whatever breed of dog you select for wildfowling, the great things are to look for breeding, courage, a love of water and a natural retrieving ability. After that must come careful training (specialised for the type of work you do), and plenty of opportunity to practice in water, reeds, and ooze. I consider this latter most important, for although many dogs will work perfectly well in water and reeds, they tend to dry up as soon as they are called upon to face sticky, oozy mud, in which they have to half swim and half flounder in order to reach their birds. Big dogs are at an advantage here, and courage is essential. Size is also an advantage when strong currents have to be tackled, although generally speaking I am not in favour of big dogs of any breed. I have always found that small or medium sized animals are just as good, if not better, and work faster and with less effort, and look more stylish in the performance of their duties.

Summing Up

Let us look at things this way. If I were a man whose main shooting was wildfowling of all types, I should certainly choose a good labrador, of medium size, of working strain, and from known water-loving parents. I should devote a great deal of attention to its early training, and water practice would be commenced as early as possible and be carried out very thoroughly. Reeds, rushes, and mud would be worked with the dummy, and great attention would be paid to teaching the puppy to cross a stream and later a river by command alone, to work the far bank. For this reason, I should pay great attention to making the dog "handy," teaching it to work straight out, and to range right and left in response to hand signals and command. I

Capt. H. Birkbeck and Capt. W. A. Fellowes (agent at Sandringham) at the Retriever Championship at Sandringham.

should also devote many dark evenings to retrieving practice, so that the dog should learn to mark by sound of fall and become accustomed to working in bad conditions of light. I should accustom it to retrieving unusual things as early as seemed safe—starlings, jays, magpies, moorhens, later graduating on to duck and game. A dog which will pick up and carry a starling will seldom, if ever, refuse a snipe, woodcock, or duck.

The wildfowlers' dog should also be taught to lie very still and to retrieve only upon command. The restless, whining dog is worse than useless to the wildfowler, although I cannot deny that for certain types of marsh shooting a dog which runs-in to fall intelligently (the operative word is intelligently) can be most useful. I stuck my neck out on this subject in the correspondence pages many years ago! However, there must be a clear distinction between running in to fall and running in to *shot.* The latter should never be allowed, but if you want a dog quick off the mark you will have to give it special practice to run-in to a falling object only.

* * *

South-Eastern Gundog Society. An A.V. Open Gundog Working Test on cold game will be held at Chiddingstone Mill Farm, Chiddingstone, Kent, judged by Mr. D. W. Browning, on January 22. Schedule and entry form from Mr. G. S. Smith, 11a High-street, Banstead, Surrey (Burgh Heath 1484).

Hare Shoots

by W. H. T. Long

HARE shooting is bound to become more popular now that the rabbit has gone. The hare is in all truth now our only ground game, and its importance and value to shooting men are correspondently increased. Hare shooting on a large organised scale—hare drives—may be expected during the next couple of months, before the season comes to an end.

That excellent book, "The King in His Country," refers to the growing popularity of hare shooting (among other back-end sport) with members of the Royal Family on the Sandringham Estate. Indeed, it appears that the last few shots fired by our late King were at hares — on that *final* February afternoon. Apart from the need to keep the hare population under control, it seems clear enough that the shooting of hares at organised drives has been found to be a minor sport and well worth the attention of good game shots.

Hare drives *have been* referred to as "organised slaughter." This is an ugly phrase. But surely if it is true that very large numbers of hares are killed on occasion, it points to the fact that their local population has been allowed to get out of control. In other words, there has been too little or too ineffective shooting in the past and hares have become too numerous. The blame here then should be directed at policy rather than at shooting.

All the same, there are both sporting and unsporting ways of shooting hares. The worst possible offence is the shooting at hares that are not within sure killing range. Hares are long and large, and they can easily become the victims of a pellet or two that are not sufficient to kill them on the spot. This unfortunate contingency is one that must be guarded against at all costs.

While back-end hare drives are attended, very often, by a cross-section of village residents, those who indulge in unnecessarily long shots should be "black-listed" for future reference. The old advice was that hares at any range much beyond thirty yards were best left alone. This may be carrying matters a little too far, but it is advice that young shots at their *first* hare shoot might well heed.

A hare walked-up and shot at twenty yards is an easy shot. A hare all-out and at full range calls for judgment and a good forward allowance. This is the kind of shot which hare drives often produce. In varying shades of light, and types of weather, across differing ground, hares may deceive even the most experienced eye. They may loom large or appear about the size of their smaller cousins of the high hills. The best of shots will miss them clean on occasion and be only too thankful if his colleagues were too busy to notice.

There is thus sport to be enjoyed and skill and knowledge to be exercised at these back-end events. The only trouble is that hares are not, and never have been, as ubiquitous as were rabbits. They cannot *fill* their place—they can only help to fill the gap. However, the early New Year will be a season of those shoots, numbers will be severely thinned out, and the art of ground game shooting will not be lost or forgotten. What good luck that hares are all but immune to myxomatosis!

Five Pigeon

by W. C.

ONE morning last September prolonged and heavy rain foiled my good resolution to get a lot of work done in my garden. By the time it was over everything was too wet and there was only just time to take the dogs—Rhoda the labrador and Binks the retriever-spaniel cross—for an hour's walk before lunch.

In spite of my assiduous attention to the crows and magpies earlier in the year there were fewer partridges last season than I can ever remember, so few indeed that I did not even try to shoot any. But I thought I might have the chance of a long shot or two at pigeon, so I decided to air my magnum, which had not been out the cabinet for some time. This gun is bored full choke in both barrels and for rough shooting I usually put a 2¼in. cartridge in the right hand and a 2¾in. or, if I am feeling extravagant, a 3in. one in the left. This time I chose 3in. for the left as I had a few loose ones that had been in stock some time.

I started off by running the dogs round a stubble that had not been cut when we first walked the ground a week before, just in case there might be a covey or two which we had missed. I was not intending to shoot a partridge. I just wanted to see if there were any about at all. As I expected, they moved nothing, but when I reached the fence half-a-dozen stock doves rose from the next field, also a stubble. So I stationed the dogs under the hedge and waited by a gap near an ash tree in case any more stock doves or pigeon came round. Nothing happened for some time and I was just about to move on when two pigeon appeared. They looked as if they were going to pass wide of me, but a last minute tack brought them straight at me. The leader gave me a simple head-on shot and fell twenty-five yards out; the second swerved away and I could only get a long shot at it through the hedge, a waste of a cartridge really, especially a 3in. one, but it might have come off.

A Satisfactory Shot

After the two shots there was quite a bit of movement and a bunch of stock doves crossed my front. The nearest presented a very easy crossing chance at thirty yards, but I fired too low, and before I could give it a second barrel it had disappeared behind the hedge. But with the left barrel I killed the last bird in the party, a satisfactory long shot that fell a good forty-five yards out.

I then worked the dogs across another cut stubble with the same absolute lack of result, and after that I began to run them through a potato field. Scarcely had I started this when some more pigeon appeared, flying very high. I blew a long blast on my whistle to signal the dogs, who were some thirty yards off, to sit, and crouched down behind some tall weeds. Only one came over, a long way up. Pigeon are never so far up as one likes to imagine when one fires at them oneself, but this one was at any rate a great deal higher than the famous beech hedge at Mickleour, between Perth and Brairgowne, over which I always fancy them or pheasants flying whenever I pass it on my way north. So I flicked the single trigger forward to fire the long cartridge in the left barrel. The bird was swinging as it came over and I was not quite on it, but it staggered off distinctly dilapidated, and after flying round a little, pitched in a tree a quarter of a mile away. I went after it, feeling pretty sure that it would clatter out before I could get within range, as, although obviously hardish hit, it had flown off fairly strongly—not with the swerveless and seemingly lazy flight that is characteristic of a mortally wounded pigeon or snipe. However, when I got near the tree I heard a flapping of wings in the hedge below and sent Rhoda forward. She soon emerged with the bird in her mouth.

One From the Stratosphere

By now it was already nearly lunch time so I turned for home. On the way a wounded or sickly pigeon flew out of a tree just out of shot and soon pitched in another. I made a small detour to come up-wind on it. When it flew out again I had a going away shot, hit it hard, and it suddenly faltered and fell dead two hundred yards on. Although from its flight there was clearly something wrong with this bird, it was plump enough.

As I was putting this last pigeon in my pocket another appeared, a bird so stratospheric that it didn't even bother to swerve on seeing me. Once more I fired the long cartridge in the left barrel and was distinctly surprised when it collapsed stone dead.

In the last field I let the dogs run again, and Binks soon came cantering up with a rabbit which he had caught in some rough stuff. It was, I regret to record, quite dead. Ever since, as a puppy, he stole and eat a couple of rabbits not intended for canine consumption, Binks has been hard mouthed with fur, though he is quite all right with anything feathered. Anyway, it was a worth-while stroll, with five pigeon and—thanks to Binks—one rabbit in the bag for the expenditure of seven cartridges; albeit four of them were long ones. And the two high shots at pigeon were some consolation for a lamentable double-barrel miss at a mallard rising from a pond the day before.

A GOOSE WITHOUT TOIL

by J. R.

I CHANCED to be spending a couple of nights in a small coastal town and I asked the owner of the hotel if he could tell me anything about the geese. He said, "You'd better talk to my ghillie—he knows more about them than I do." So I went and found the ghillie, a charming old man. He told me that on their way in and out the geese often followed the course of the river which flowed into the bay, and that if I went along the right bank I could get down to the foreshore very easily.

Despite the ghillie's pessimism and the fact that it was a mild, windless and utterly unsuitable day, I decided to go down that afternoon. I took with me a friend, my black labrador Rhoda and my yellow labrador bitch puppy. We drove a mile or so in the car, parked it by the field which I had been told to go through, and walked about three hundred yards through this field, along the river bank, then another two hundred yards across the saltings. When we came to a big cross gutter which stopped us we sat on the river bank and waited.

After twenty minutes I heard geese calling inland. I thought they were farmyard birds at first. Then I suddenly realised that the sound was getting nearer that they must be greylags. So I stood up. Nearer and nearer came the clamour, but I still could not see the geese. Then at last I did see them, wide line of eighty or so flying quite reasonably low in spite of the lack of wind. It was clear that most of them would pass wide of me, but a small lot of five on the right wing of the skein looked as if they would come just near enough. I kept my head down until they were nearly level. Then up went the magnum. The nearest bird staggered, mortally hit. A second barrel to make sure and it slumped on the mud.

I sent Rhoda for it. She cantered out waddled back, slowly but proudly. I took the goose from her and we strolled back to the car through the warm, quiet dusk. We soon got back to the hotel for a not very late tea. It was as easy as that. Scarcely worth doing in fact. All the same, that goose—an 8¼lb. one—was the best I have yet eaten and in one form or another it did us several meals.

I rose at "Tower-Bird's" time the next morning in the hopes of getting another shot as the geese came in. They all passed two hundred yards to my left. But to make up for that I killed five wigeon going out—five with four cartridges. The reason for this unusual ratio was that when one lot came over extra high I fired at the leading bird and killed the next two stone dead.

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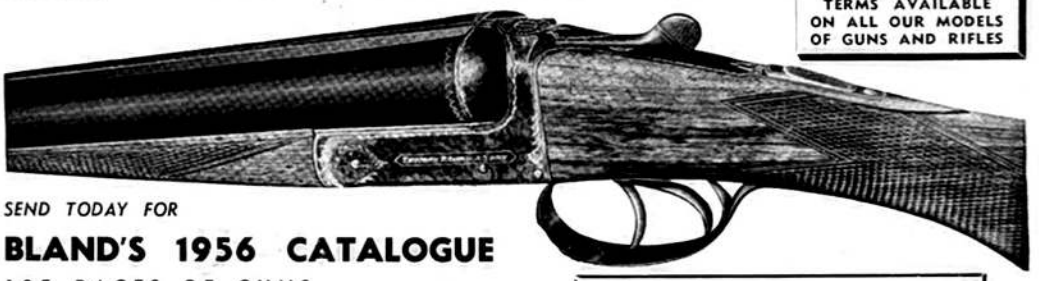

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